JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

Wordeater Restaurant

Specialty:
Literary Cuisine

* MENU *

- Short Stories
- Poetry
- Play on Words
- Humor
- Drama

Serving our hungry patron for 72 ye

WORDEATER 72

STAFF

Judy Belfield, Alex Bennett, Sue Cherven, Jerry Janes, Bob Loewe
Maria Mellinger, John Stobart

In order to get a selection published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance.
For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

AWARDS

Prose

$10 Maria Mellinger
$ 5 Bob Loewe*
$ 5 Joey McGrath
$ 5 Shelly Cawker

Poetry

$10 Maria Mellinger
$ 5 Sherry Gunderman
$ 5 Dawn Simmons

Covers

$20 Anna Danbury

*See NOTE about Bob Loewe at the end of the Table of Contents page.

Next Deadlines:

October 5, 1990
November 30, 1990
February 22, 1991
April 26, 1991

Manuscripts or cover designs for

Wordeater 73

must be submitted to

John Stobart in Room C-1069 by:

October 5, 1990

All copyrights are retained by the authors, and materials may not be reprinted without their permissions.

WORDEATER 72

Table of Contents

Maria Mellinger	An Indian Man Told Me	1
Karen Carten	As I Search Through My Mind	1
Maria Mellinger	While I Can Write	1
Dawn Simmons	Fallacy	1
Bob Loewe	There Is A Time When Your Brain Rebels	1
Maria Mellinger	Twenty Thousand Words	2
Judy Belfield	Passed Tense	2
Maria Mellinger	He Was A Fine Statue	2
Sherry Gunderman	The History of Modern Art	3
Dawn Simmons	Palette	3
Bob Loewe	Still the Wheel Goes Round	3
Maria Mellinger	Do Saints Read the Personal Ads?	4
Maria Mellinger	Garage Floor Barefoot	4
Sherry Gunderman	Union Station	4
Judy Belfield	Departurres	5
Bob Loewe	If I Had A Penny	5
Joey McGrath	Secret Loser	6
Shelly Cawker	Janine & Mandy	7
Judy Belfield	Squalor	10
Joey McGrath	Eating Away of the Bones	10
Maria Mellinger	You Could Have Been Warm	11
Dawn Simmons	The Meadow	11
Connie Ehrler	Skip	12
Julie Haggerty	A Child's Hatred	13
Shelly Cawker	One Or the Other	13
Peg Skyberg	Solitary Mourner	14
Sherry Gunderman	Vernal Equinox	15
Peg Skyberg	Storm	15
Dawn Simmons	Moon	17
Sherry Gunderman	Blood Sister	17
Walter Coffey	The Bloody Bunch	17
Maria Mellinger	You, Trigger-Man	20
Sherry Gunderman	Little Boys Cry	20
Shelly Cawker	Childhood Memories	20
Dawn Simmons	Sequestration	21
Maria Mellinger	Throw All Your Memories	21
Judy Belfield	Impermanence	22
Maria Mellinger	We're Not Deep	22
Bob Loewe	There Is A Time	23
Matt Brown	Structural Unemployment	23
Maria Mellinger	Fifth of Whiskey in His Hand	25
Judy Belfield	Prince	25
Joey McGrath	Coming of Age	25
Maria Mellinger	The Party Goes On	27
Shelly Cawker	Kelly	27
Maria Mellinger	The Night We Discovered Pleasure	28
Judy Belfield	Longing	28
Maria Mellinger	Let Me Hold Your Face	28
Bob Loewe	Just A Bob	29
Sherry Gunderman	His Habit	29
Rosalyn Neitzel	Beautiful Gail	29
Peg Skyberg	Where the Heart Is	31
Shelly Cawker	Carina	33
Maria Mellinger	1692 Cotton Mather Newsreel, Part 2	34

NOTE: Also accepted for this issue was Bob Loewe's short story, "Galladon," which we find impossible to include because of space limitations. Bob was awarded one of the WORDEATER 72 prose prizes for his work on "Galladon." Look for it in WORDEATER 73.

Maria Mellinger

AN INDIAN MAN TOLD ME

An Indian Man told me
That the world rests
On the back of an elephant.

"And the elephant rests on...?"
I asked.

The Indian Man told me,
"A turtle."

"And the turtle...?"
I asked
In search of solid ground.

"From there it's turtles,"
He said,
"Turtles all the way down."

«««««»»»»»

Karen Carten

AS I SEARCH THROUGH MY MIND

As I search through my mind,
I find
A trapped part of space,
That has not a place
A tightly locked door that
Hasn't a key,
A small broken piece
Of me.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

WHILE I CAN WRITE

While I can write about
What we've discussed,
Learned, discovered, or knew,
I can never repeat what we've whispered,
Or I would be lost to you.

«««««»»»»»

Dawn Simmons

FALLACY

Dancing waves of starlight carry me away
to a land
of rainbows' ends
and
bubbles of imagination
where early morning dewdrops
twinkle in the valleys
and
children play "Ring Around the Rosie"
while waterfalls sing
as beauty blossoms
and there is no pain.

«««««»»»»»

Bob Loewe

THERE IS A TIME WHEN YOUR BRAIN REBELS

There is a time
When your brain rebels
When the best thing
For your grade
Is to skip a class
And drive around
Top down
Sunglasses on
Radio blaring
First gear
Breeze flies
Over the windshield
Second gear
The music is baffled
By the wind
Third gear
Gales blow in your face
Turn up the radio
The car shakes with sound
You can feel the music
Stop sign!
Houbolt Avenue
First gear
Second
THIRD
FOURTH
FIFTH and FLYING!
No school today.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

TWENTY THOUSAND WORDS

Twenty thousand words
Or more,
Deep inside my head,
Stumble somehow
To get to you;
Fumble to be said.
Instead I kick them
To the floor
And turn to look
At you once more
As you turn the page of your old book
And twenty thousand
useless words
Give you a useless look.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

HE WAS A FINE STATUE

He was a fine statue when
She found him, with an
Imperfection or two
To attract her instincts.
So she chipped him here and there
To straighten his jawline,
Sharpen his features,
Give him personality.
She sanded the rough spots of rock,
Polished his pedestal,
And tried to permanently engrave her name
Into his marble veins.
But all that remained when she
Picked up her hammer
Was a pile of pebbles and sand
That had once been a man.

«««««»»»»»

Judy Belfield

PASSED TENSE

Catching myself staring
breathing shallow
an unbearable pain
in my throat...
in the next moment
I'll die, I think,
surely I'll die.
And then another moment passes.
I am still alive
feeling
impossible neck swelling
bullfrog swelling
expansive pain
but I'm alive.
Another moment has softened the volume
on the intrusive melody of life
then closes over my windpipe
like a thick sliding door
deadly silent.
This, then, is the moment
when I'll die,
float away
as softly as chiffon
on jasmine-scented breezes
and never come back
to these moments
pulled like rubber bands
tightly tightly
across my heart.
And now another moment passes;
I am sick with moments
nauseated by emptiness
and ridiculous yearnings
I had thought were murdered
along with other adolescent dreams
too silly now to recount.
I reflect not at all well these days,
dear Wordsworth,
I think I've lived too long...
Is that another moment
passing?

«««««»»»»»

Sherry Gunderman

THE HISTORY OF MODERN ART

I see you
Sitting within my reach
You crack your knuckles
And muss your hair
And play with your lips
And do not know
That you are being watched.

You doodle on your notebook
But do not chew nervously on your pen
As I do.
I can see your world
Through the side of your glasses
And images that are clear to you
Are blurred and muddled
Through my eyes.

You flick your finger
Against your nose
To ease an invisible force
While I question your thoughts
And ponder your name
For although you've singled me out
I am hesitant to speak to you
For fear of sounding inferior
Because I want to know you better.

You smile at the professor's jokes
And dimples appear on your cheeks.
You are right-handed—and tap your left foot
To a silent beat.
You lick your lips, and catch my gaze
Through the corner of your hazel eye...
And smile.
I am embarrassed, but do not look away.
You smile again, with humor,
Because I am caught...
But turn back to your notes
And return to your shroud
Of mystery.

«««««»»»»»

Dawn Simmons

PALETTE

What are you saying?
How can you say that?
You mustn't let my
Delightful world become tainted with tears
Of yesteryear,
Though you try.
However,
Everyone knows that
You must
Find watercolored moonbeams
And hazy summer nights
Like in the movies.
Like in the movies?
I don't quiet believe it.
No, I don't.
Like in my daydreams.
Oh yes, my plentiful daydreams, where
Violins play me to sleep
Every afternoon at around 3:47.

«««««»»»»»

Bob Loewe

STILL THE WHEEL GOES ROUND

Still the wheel goes round
each point
a transient point to the next
each spoke
a passing event
around and around
endlessly.
A perpetual motion machine
And what does it mean?

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

DO SAINTS READ THE PERSONAL ADS?

-Hot Lips, missed you last Friday. Red Nose.

-Thank you, St. Joseph. We sold the house.

-Attention: Have you been caught in a gypsy scam? Have large caravans of people in Russian garb robbed your house? Have you found half-eaten goat cheese or loose tarot cards? We can help. Box 5.

-Join the Friends of Linda Kasabian Society. She's really, really, really sorry.

-Godarchy! Not anarchy!

-Red Nose, missed you Friday. Hot Lips.

-To anyone who's been here. Where am I?

-You are here. John.

-St. Jude, don't make it bad. Take a sad song and make it better...

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

GARAGE FLOOR BAREFOOT

Garage floor barefoot
We dance
With our eyes;
You sitting there,
Me all the way over here...
With this kind of distance,
We might as well be in love.

«««««»»»»»

Sherry Gunderman

UNION STATION

Union Station looked bleak against the late day drizzle. A yellow Checker cab pulled along the curb and sprayed the already wet sidewalk with gray street water.

She got out, handed the driver a ten, and shut the door softly without a word to reveal her emotions. She pulled her khaki overcoat close around her neck and marveled at the city for a brief moment. The grayness of the day made twilight seem nearer than it was. Shop lights twinkled in neon colors through the light rain.

She checked her watch and ran down the gray cement stairs to the entrance of the train station. She passed a group of sailors coming up the stairs as she went down. One whistled and she ignored his immaturity.

She walked past gift shops and underground delis with anticipation in her stride. Her heels clicked in rhythmic tempo. Strangers' faces blurred into one as she hurried further and further into the heart of the station.

She pushed politely past strollers and screaming children and tired mothers who looked as gray as the day that they were a part of. Weathered old men sitting on benches winked at her as she passed and she smiled to them.

She stopped at Track Two and took a tattered piece of paper from her coat pocket. She checked the time again and watched the digital display race announcements of train arrivals and departures from right to left.

The green and white sign above Track Two lit up—answering her silent question. Her hair was forgotten. Her lipstick was gone. She put her hands into her pockets and waited.

A man in a wheelchair came first. He was followed by grandparents who were greeted with sunny "hellos" from an entourage of children and grandchildren. She tried in vain to untangle her memory...top remember features and expression, style and height.

A man of twenty came out alone. Her heart leapt and lodged in her throat. "Daddy! Daddy!" A little girl from behind her broke free from her mother's hold and ran into the arms of this man. Crowds gathered. Thirty or more people got off of the train, but no one looked for her.

Confusion hovered above her consciousness—and she feared the absurd: that he had not come, he didn't want to see her. She glimpsed a familiar face through a break in the crowd. The face searched the crowd momentarily. The people in front of him left for their homes and the man stood alone.

His arms looked unbalanced in proportion as he held a burlap shoulder bag in his left hand and a much heavier burgundy suitcase in his right.

She saw him first—and uttered his name

(continued)

barely louder than a whisper. She said it again, louder this time, yet still not loud enough for him to hear. His eyes darted from face to face in the crowd, but settled on hers...and on hers they stayed.

His eyes looked tired. His shoulders drooped and his stance was weary. Yet when he locked eyes with her, he controlled her pulse as he had since day one. He smiled and began to walk towards her. Those sixty feet felt like sixty miles.

She looked good. She had lost weight and gained charisma. He was beautiful. Those two years of absence had given him determination and pride.

She wanted to run towards him, but held her ground as if her feet had become part of the cement block that they were standing on. He stopped in front of her. He tried to read her eyes with his, but she was too busy studying his features—trying to imprint on her brain's core the squareness of his jaw and the thoughtful curve to his eyebrows.

His perfection frightened her as she suffocated in a whirlpool of emotions: Love versus Platonic Friendship. What he wanted had always confused her. And what she wanted had always flustered him. He set his bags down simultaneously.

He was tall—almost a foot taller than her—but his height wasn't awkward as he bent to hug her. She stood on her toes and buried her face into the shoulder of his gray raincoat. he smiled with security as he braided his fingers into her hair.

«««««»»»»»

Bob Loewe

IF I HAD A PENNY

If I had a penny
for every stray thought
my coffers would be full
and my life empty
because all my dreams
had been sold.

«««««»»»»»

Judy Belfield

DEPARTURES

The day before he left
she stomped her foot in the car
said she didn't want to go home;
he said, of course, she must.
"Please,"
she begged.
Tears pooled in her eyes.
"Please."
"What can we do?" he asked.
"Kill ourselves," she said.
They laughed.
"Don't take me home yet,"
her voice barely making sound.
He said they couldn't drive around
forever.
She knew it; he didn't need to keep
closing up the time
with words
making the finality so audible...
Couldn't they just
silently
slip apart
slide away from each other?
She ached.
In her throat.
In her cheekbones.
She would not cry.
She would not say goodbye.
She told him so.
"That's right," he said,
"keep something for yourself."
Before she stepped from the car
she felt the something
she'd kept for herself
suddenly tighten in her gut.
She did not double over
from the pain;
she walked to her front door
turned
watched him drive away.
"Daddy," she whispered to the walls,
"why didn't you die in the war...."

«««««»»»»»

Joey McGrath

SECRET LOSER

Bobby McLeer thought: These bastards will never get away with it.

His parents had decided to move to a different town once again. It was really starting to piss him off. This would be the fourth time now. The first time they had decided to move didn't really matter to him. He had only been three years old at the time. He didn't remember anything about his first home. It remained in the back of his subconscious only to torture his dreams at night. He was too young to have any close friends that he would miss later. A child of three had no other choice but to obey.

The second time was different. He was ten years of age when his father and mother chose to move west in order top find better living conditions. Bobby had tried to rebel against the idea by running away the night before moving. His father caught up to him and beat him severely. He found Bobby hiding in a drainage ditch alongside the road they lived on. When his father found him, he scowled down at Bobby and told him that if he ever tried another stunt like that again he would beat him to death. He beat him that night in the drainage ditch. He beat him enough to where Bobby urinated blood for weeks after. His mother knew what had happened. She had instructed his father to beat him if he was found. Bobby also suffered from a broken collar bone from his father's beating that night. he could remember how the lightning bolt of pain shot through his body and how his father stood over him grinning. Grinning because he could inflict such pain and be able to get away with it. His father knew he had broken the collar bone and yet he continued to beat him until he blacked out.

When he awoke, he was in a hospital bed. His parents were in the room with him. They were standing against the far wall. Grinning. That same goddamned grin he had seen on his father's face after he had broken his collar bone. They stayed with him to insure that Bobby would not talk to the nurses about his injury and how he actually obtained it. While the nurses were out of the hospital room, his father would remind him of what would happen if he talked. He would apply pressure on Bobby's broken collar bone until tears would well up in his eyes.

At night, Bobby would curse his parents and wish them damnation. As he awoke in the morning, his parents had taken up their positions at the foot of his bed. There to remain until the end of the day. Three days passed like this until he was finally dismissed from the hospital. The doctor had told his parents that they should have the boy back in a week for therapy. They lied and said they would, but disregarded the order. As Bobby walked out the front doors, he could see their station wagon had already been packed and that they were about to leave. That was the second time.

The third time was almost death to Bobby. His parents greeted him at the door one day as he was returning from school. The station wagon was packed and ready in the driveway.

"Get in the car, Bobby," said his father.

"What's going on?" Bobby asked.

"We're leaving. Now get in the car," his father demanded.

"No."

"We don't have any time for your nonsense. Now get in the car."

"No!"

His father walked to the back of the car and pulled something from the back. Bobby could not see what it was.

"I've just about had enough of this. Now get in the goddamned car!"

Bobby dropped his book bag and started to back away from his parents.

"Don't do it, Bobby." His father showed him the tire iron he was holding. He twirled the iron like a baton and approached Bobby.

Bobby started to run away. His father threw the iron in a side-armed fashion with full force behind it. The iron struck Bobby below the right shoulder blade. Bobby heard the snap of a rib breaking and then felt the numbing pain shoot throughout his back. He fell down a few feet from the sidewalk that ran past their house. The breath shot from his lungs in a powerful blast, leaving him gasping for air. He tried to get up, but the pain of the broken rib kept him down.

His parents approached. His mother went to the sidewalk and retrieved the tire iron. She casually walked back to the station wagon, tossed the iron in the back, and got in the passenger side.

His father lifted him up by the armpits and dragged his son to the car. He threw open the door and pushed Bobby in. Bobby let out a small yelp of pain and then passed out. His father walked to the back of the car and got a roll of twine. He tied Bobby's wrists together and then got into the car. They drove off and headed for the interstate. That happened on Bobby's thirteenth birthday.

Now was the fourth time. It had been five years since the last ordeal. Two days ago his parents told him to pack up and get ready to leave. This time he didn't argue. He knew better now. He quietly packed his things and got into the car. The same goddamned station wagon. It was beat to shit from all the wear and tear, but it still ran. He had other plans for his parents along this trip.

He had learned a lot of things about his parents since

(continued)

the last time they moved. He had learned the secret of why they moved around so much. His father had been a resident in an insane asylum for ten years. His illness included paranoia and shortness of temper. While in the hospital he met Diane, his mother. she was a nurse at the hospital and hand helped his father escape. She then quit her job and went off to marry him. They had a baby a year later. It wasn't Bobby. The first baby died during childbirth. She had tried to commit suicide afterward but was stopped by the nurses at the hospital. Since then, she has had a hatred for all children. Even after Bobby was born, she continued to hate children, even her own son.

Bobby had learned all this information by going through their drawers one day while they were gone. He found the hospital documents, newspaper clippings, and other pieces of information that helped put the puzzle together. He also found their insurance papers. His mother had a policy made out that in the case of death, the next closes relative would receive $50,000. His father had a similar policy made out in the sum of $90.000.

That's why his parents weren't going to make it through the summer alive. They were going to die along this trip and he would receive the insurance money and try to lead a normal life.

Right now, the only thing that focused in his vision was the passing meadows and fields as they drove on. They were driving into Oregon. The view was beautiful. He had never seen anything like it, and his parents weren't going to take him away from it.

As soon as they settled into the new house, he knew exactly how he was going to kill them. Thoughts of his parents dead made him feel excited. He was not in the least feeling guilty about it.

He sank back into the sofa chair of the station wagon and relaxed. He stared down into his hands. They were clenched tightly. He opened them and saw the bloody half-moon marks his nails had cut deep within his palms.

"Are you sure you had enough, Bobby?" his mother asked from across the table.

"Yes. I've had plenty." He got up and excused himself from the table.

"Didn't you say you were going out tonight?" his father asked.

"Yeah. I'm going to see what the night life around this town is like."

"Good. It might do you some good."

"Like you really care."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. I don't. Just get the hell out of here."

Bobby grabbed his coat and walked out the door. The cool night air met him pleasantly. He walked to the back of the house and out to the field behind it. He would wait in the field until they had gone to bed.

An hour passed by since the last light went out in his house. He got up from the ground and walked to the house. He quietly unlocked the door and left it open for his escape. He walked softly to the basement door and descended down the steps. He switched on the light and started to scan the ceiling for the gas pipes. he spotted one at the far wall of the basement. He took the pipe cutter from his pocket and tightened it onto the pipe. He twisted the cutter around the pipe a couple of times until it moved freely. He tightened it a little bit more and twisted again. The third time he tightened it, the pipe broke quietly and gas hissed out from the opening. The smell of the gas almost overpowered him and sent him back gasping for clean air. He hurried across the basement and turned off the light. He quietly ascended the stairs and closed the basement door behind him. He fumbled around in the darkness looking for the things he had gathered earlier that day. He found the book of matches and the candle where he left them. He lit the candle, placed it in its holder and set it on the ground at the foot of the door.

He went to the refrigerator and pulled open the fruit drawer. He took out a lemon and put it in his pocket. He went to the back door and left just as quietly as he came.

He started laughing with excitement. He felt like a school boy getting ready for his first date. he walked down the street about seven blocks and stopped under a street light. He waited.

Ten minutes later, it came. First, he saw the sky light up in a brilliant yellow luminescence. Then he heard the booming noise of the explosion. At the first sound of the explosion, his heart skipped a beat. He felt warm all over. He felt good.

He started walking back towards his raging inferno that he called home. As he got near the house, he pulled the lemon from his pocket. He popped in his thumbnail and tore a hole in the side. He raised it above his head and squeezed the acidic juice into his eyes. He had to force out some tears.

«««««»»»»»

Shelly Cawker

JANINE & MANDY

"Mmmm, I can already smell the surf and feel the sand on my feet. I can taste the hot dogs and smell the suntan lotion on all those big, blonde, gorgeous guys just flexing their muscles and waiting for me!"

Janine was fantasizing in the passenger seat of the

(continued)

small car they'd rented. Keeping one eye on the traffic, Mandy peeked over to catch Janine's dreamy expression and laughed. She was used to Janine's exaggerating.

Mandy often wondered how she and Janine remained such good friends. They were so different, yet they were as close as sisters. They were both 5'7" and slim with golden hair and brown eyes and shared each other's clothes. But while Janine was more outgoing and excitable, Mandy was quieter and calm. Mandy had taken this spring break vacation to relax and maybe read a few good novels and to get away from city life. Obviously, Janine had come to meet as many men as possible and then to meet some more! That, Mandy thought, would definitely not be a problem. Guys were always attracted to Janine, and to Mandy too, but while Janine felt she owed it to all of them to flirt with them at least a little bit, Mandy didn't care much for guys who were so obviously drooling. Janine could wrap a man around her little finger so he'd soon be doing anything she asked, but Mandy preferred a guy with a little more backbone.

Mandy maneuvered the car into a cramped parking space and stopped with a jolt to wake Janine up. Almost before she took the key out of the ignition, Janine was up and running toward the beach, her towel and beach bag read to go. Mandy smiled and grabbed her own bag. Seeing Janine's excitement, she silently vowed to try to not be too boring. You're here to have fun, she reminded herself. loosen up a little! Then she ran to catch Janine.

It's not fair, Simon thought of his predicament for the billionth time. He'd just settled in for his three-hour life guarding shift at the beach. It was everyone's spring break and the place was packed. He looked down at all the girls lying on towels, gossiping with friends and listening to radios, pretending that they weren't sneaking little glances at him. Sometimes they made him so mad he wanted to throw his whistle down, race into the ocean, and drown them. It was their fault he was in this situation anyway! The job did have its rewards, however. He did have a great tan and his light brown hair, streaked with blonde from the sun, drove the girls crazy. That came in handy when he wasn't feeling sorry for himself and could enjoy the hot summer scenery, like those two blondes who'd just set their stuff up on a patch of sand about fifty yards away.

"Did you see that lifeguard?" Janine asked breathlessly as she positioned herself so her best side was facing him and began slowly and deliberately massaging oil over her body. Janine believed every side was her good side, so she simply chose her best side. Mandy didn't see the difference between either side.

As usual, maybe only fifteen minutes had passed before Janine's roaming eyes and confident smiles paid off and surrounded her with two or three guys. Brushing the sand off her legs, Mandy stood up and headed over to the hot dog stand to buy a Coke. As she approached the lifeguard chair, a fluffy blue towel landed on the sand just ahead of her. Smiling, she picked it up.

"Drop something?" she asked the lifeguard. If she'd been Janine, she would have considered it a total come-on and been ready to go home with him.

"Yeah, thanks," he replied with a friendly smile, taking the towel from her. "Your friend seems pretty popular," he mused.

"Yeah," she agreed. "She is.

"So why aren't you down there sharing the attention?"

"Because...," she faltered, not wanting to say that she was uninterested in dumb jocks falling all over each other trying to impress her. "Because I'm thirsty," she finished. He smiled at her again.

"Can I buy you a Coke?"

"Shouldn't you be watching for drowning people or something?"

"Well, if you're that thirsty, I could be saving your life," he suggested with a charming twinkle in his startling blue eyes. She smiled and shook her head.

"No thanks," she said and walked away. Just like the others, she thought, except he wasn't falling at her feet. When she returned, Janine was alone.

"Losing your touch?" Mandy teased her.

"Of course not! I'm just taking a break," Janine replied. Mandy shook her head.

"So what's with the lifeguard?" Janine asked.

"Nothing. What about you and the body builders?"

"We're going to a club tonight. Do you want to come?"

"That's okay. You go and have fun."

"Okay."

"Be careful!" Mandy always said that before Janine went out. Later that night, before Janine came in, Mandy found herself looking out at the blue of the ocean, blue like the lifeguard's eyes.

Mandy woke up early the next morning to find Janine deeply asleep on the sofa, where she seemed to have passed out. She was still dressed and had just managed to kick off her shoes before she crashed. Knowing Janine would sleep until mid-afternoon or longer, Mandy left a note and headed back to the beach.

As she sat out under the sun, she noticed with surprising disappointment that there was a different lifeguard on duty. She shrugged it off, put on her sunglasses and started to read a book she'd brought along. She was deeply engrossed in chapter four when a long shadow clouded the pages. Removing her sunglasses, she

(continued)

looked around.

"Hi again. Good book?" It was the lifeguard from the day before. She nodded and squinted up at him.

"You're not working today?"

"No, but I'm here even when I'm off. Where else is there to go to relax and take it easy?" He smiled easily. Mandy thought of Janine and her own promise to liven up a bit.

"Sit down with me," she invited. As he did, he noticed the title of her book. She blushed.

"Good book," he repeated, but not as a question.

"You've read it?" she asked a little disbelievingly. He nodded, then sheepishly added, "I'm a romantic at heart, just don't tell anybody."

"Why?" she asked intrigued.

"Don't girls like the big, macho guys, you know, the ones who bench a thousand pounds with one hand and all?"

"A thousand pounds with one hand?" she asked, giggling. "Our standards aren't usually quite that high. At least mine aren't."

"Well, good, because otherwise, I'd have to be leaving. By the way, my name is Simon Marquet."

"I'm Mandy Taylor."

They spent the afternoon on the beach talking. She found out that he'd lived in California all his life with his grandparents after his parents were killed in a car accident. He was currently a student at Berkeley College studying medicine and had taken the job as a lifeguard to make money to pay the rent and to spend his vacations at the beach. He was an only child and he liked movies, books, music, and houses, just like she did. He was friendly, polite and easy to talk to. He was very open and honest and his emotions were clearly expressed in his blue eyes. Although normally Mandy wouldn't go out with a guy she'd only known for a few hours, she felt that she could relate to Simon, and said yes when he asked her out that evening.

That evening was the start of a dream come true. Simon took her out for a nice dinner and walk along the beach in the evening, when it was truly peaceful and quiet and they could walk barefoot in the foamy water and look up at the stars glittering in the midnight blue sky. After that, they spend every day together. They would go to the beach on the days he worked or bicycling or skating when he was off. They went to some wild and crazy beach parties, had fun and danced, but soon left to be alone together. Sometimes they would just drive and talk for hours or they would just be together for hours, not saying very much.

Simon was unlike anyone she'd ever met. He wasn't crude or obnoxious. He didn't try to slam her down in the back seat when they were alone, but he let her know in subtle, gentle ways that her loved her and wanted to show her. What made her even more nervous was that she wanted it too, but didn't know if she was ready,m so she decided to consult Janine.

She got her chance on their eighth day there, when Janine came in from another date. Mandy swore that of their entire vacation she'd seen Janine for a total of maybe two and a half days.

"Janine, we have less than five days left...I don't want to lose him, but I don't know if I can do it."

"You haven't spent the night with him at all?" Mandy shook her head. "Don't do it because you want to keep him," Janine advised. "Do it because you love him."

"I do love him, Janine. I really do."

"Then you already have the right answer." They shared a special smile and hugged each other.

"Are you going out later?" Mandy asked. Janine nodded.

"With Phil." Phil had been Janine's date for the last three days.

"Things getting serious?" asked Mandy.

"Me serious? You know better!" Janine laughed, her brown eyes sparkling. "But," she added, "I probably won't be home tonight either."

"Take it easy and be careful!" Mandy admonished with a smile.

"Always!"

That night, Simon took Mandy out for another romantic dinner followed by some slow dances. As they swayed, holding each other, she felt his body pressed hard against her and his arms pulled her closer as his lips glided across her neck. She could feel his desire and her own.

Back at his place, in the living room before a roaring fire, he took her in his arms again and began to softly kissJanien and Mandy, continued and caress her. Mandy knew this was how it should be. Simon tenderly lifted her up and carried her into the bedroom.

Mandy woke up the next morning in Simon's embrace and sighed. What a wonderful night, pure heaven. Everything had been just like one of the romance novels she'd read.

"Stay here with me, Mandy," Simon asked when he woke up. The decision was easy and for the last four days of her vacation Mandy lived with Simon in his cozy apartment.

Four more nights of passion, warmth and love, and a few afternoons as well, passed and Mandy thought she would never experience anything like this again. But her break was over and she had to go home. Simon promised to make their last night together spectacular, and he did.

(continued)

He made her feel things she'd never felt before. She knew if she dropped dead that instant, she would die happy. Janine always said if you were gonna go, that was the way to do it.

Mandy had arranged to meet Janine at the airport that afternoon. Simon helped her collect her things and carry her suitcases, then he drove her to the airport.

"Don't look so sad, Mandy. It's not over for us," Simon said, gently wiping away her tears. She looked at him, wanting to believe. Those blue eyes of his looked at her for a long time before he lowered his head to kiss her. It was a simple kiss that grew stronger and stronger. Neither of them could let go. If only they had more time, just one more chance!

"I'll never forget you, Simon," Mandy sobbed, holding his hand tightly.

"I know you won't. I'll be with your forever," he said. The final call for her flight came over the loudspeaker. He took a small box out of his pocket and pressed it into her hand.

"Don't open this until you're up in the air," he said. "It's so you'll always remember me." That brought on a whole new wave of tears for Mandy. She took the box and hugged him again, vowing to keep in touch.

"We'll be together again," he promised. Deep down, she doubted it, although it was still nice to hear.

With a deep breath, Mandy slung her bag over her shoulder and headed for her gate, cradling his gift in her arms. She looked back once. His blue eyes had become icy and cold as he stared at her, but she thought he was just trying to hide his feelings. She waved one last time. He slowly lifted his hand as well. Then she boarded the plane.

Thirty minutes later, they were up in the air. Mandy had done nothing but gaze out the window while Janine did her best to cheer her. Then she remembered Simon's present and opened it eagerly. As she ripped off the paper, she could almost feel his lips and his hands. She could smell his musky scent, see his blue eyes and hear his voice. Inside the box was a black wooden case that looked like a casket. The hinge creaked when she opened it and found a slip of paper: WELCOME TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF AIDS

«««««»»»»»

Judy Belfield

SQUALOR

The shabbiness of things
comes through sometimes,
an obsession
playing itself intensely;
no matter what happens
the eye catches
every not-quite-clean place.
At these times
I muse about Freud,
realize that he, also,
shared in the filth.
The calendar rolls over,
chases out grimy snow
with contaminated sunshine
which lights up all the hidden spots
where the dirt has been gathering,
hatching as silently
as maggots.
I think about the day
when parts of me
will become slick with stench.
Not even these words
will save me.

«««««»»»»»

Joey McGrath

EATING AWAY OF THE BONES

Eating away of the bones
Internal decomposition
Searing pain in the lungs
Painful respiration
Breathe with the help of tubes
Avoid asphyxiation
Fed through multiple IV's
Stop starvation
Not strong enough to speak
Mental deprivation
Dying of cancer
Life termination

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

YOU COULD HAVE BEEN WARM

You could have been warm,
Wearing the jacket you gave to me
Because I was cold.
You could have been safe,
Back on the Navy base instead of
This open area of the city.
At the very least,
You could have been comfortable,
In your own bed,
Instead of sleeping head to head with me
On a bench in the train station
So you could say goodbye
To me in the morning.

«««««»»»»»

Dawn Simmons

THE MEADOW

The cool breeze
carried a springtime fragrance
that had hypnotic powers on my emotions.
I was surrounded by colorful flowers
freshly painted by Mother Nature.
A wild daisy seemed to smile at me,
and I picked it.
Was it glorified by this breathtaking environment
as much as I?
The sky was flawless.
I could almost see clear to Heaven.

I looked up into it, and I saw you.
I called out to you.
You would not answer.
I called again, but got no response.
"He can't hear me," I thought.
Yes, my friend,
you heard me.
You sat happy and content perched up on your pedestal.

"Go on.
I don't need you anymore,"
you finally answered.
Your fear of love had gone too far.
"It's not worth it.
Now go."
Pushed away with such invisible force,
I dropped my flower and fell to my knees crying.
In the blink of my eyes
you snatched my dream away
and tucked it safe and snug in your pocket.
I wanted it back.
Fists pounding on the pedestal,
I could not make it tumble down.
My knuckles bled, but not nearly as much
as my heart.

Like watering a flower,
my tears drenched the ground below,
and your pedestal grew even higher.
"NO!" I screamed as I gazed up at you.
The earth soaked up more tears,
and I awaited your heartless answer.
I looked,
and you were gone.
Your pedestal carried you farther and farther,
higher and higher,
until you were engulfed by the Great Blue Sky.
You were not aware of my ringing cries.

As time passed,
Mother Nature's canvas
was painted over many times;
each picture being more beautiful than the last.
Like you said to do,
I "went on,"
and
I found New Love.

He meant more to me now than you ever did.
And he held a bigger place in my heart
than you ever did.
You and your tarnished pedestal
seemed no more than a mere speck of paint
splattered on Mother Nature's canvas.
You were just a part of the blurry background
placed there to fill up empty space.

Then one day
the sky was bluer than ever before.
And the air smelled sweeter.
And the flowers were painted brighter.
And the birds sang merrier.

(continued)

The Meadow, continued

All of them,
more than ever before.

We walked through the meadow
(My New Love and I)
hand in hand.
The dirt that once turned to mud from my tears
now cracked from dryness.
My New Love picked a smiling wild daisy
and gave it to me.
The Crayola Green grass swished
with each step of our feet.
Forever, this day belonged to us.
We sat in the shade beneath a tree
sharing our hopes and dreams with each other.

Then I thought of you.
Yes, you.
I thought of all the grief you caused me.
And of all the tears you made me cry.
And of you so proudly perched on your pedestal.
I thought of all of this,
and I laughed.
I laughed at the fact that
you once meant so much to me,
for now I was so happy, so blessed.

The strength of my laughter
made the ground of the meadow shake.
Your pedestal trembled gently at first,
but then quite rough.
It swayed back and forth.
It cracked and crumbled
and finally came crashing down to the ground
bringing you with it.

You sat amongst the ruins
wondering what had happened.
You looked across the meadow and saw two people
sitting under a tree.
I saw you, and I waved.
You waved back.
Then, realizing it was me,
you got up onto your feet
and ran towards me
crying my name.
Suddenly my New Love and I
were no longer looking across to you,
but we looked
down to you.
Not only had you fallen off your pedestal,
but you had fallen into a deep hole.
A deep hole dug by
your past ego and insecurities
and your present heartbreak and sorrow.
As you cried my name louder,
you fell deeper into the hole.
Your heart was drowning in an ocean of tears.
This time they were yours.

Then the hole began to close up,
suffocating you and your pain
until I could no longer hear
your silent cries.

«««««»»»»»

Connie Ehrler

SKIP

This story is about a small rodent type animal that was adopted by our family. He came to us as a hairless, three-legged new-born. His mother was carrying him to a new home when a hunter shot her. The pair dropped abruptly to the ground. The fall didn't kill them and the mother bit the baby's front leg off. The mother dying shortly after, the hunter felt deeply for orphaning this rodent so he picked it up. It was wrapped in an old baby's blanket it was given to my mother.

Now my mother is a typical mother. She feels sorry for birds in winter and is always throwing out food for them. After Christmas when usually the Christmas tree will be put out for the garbage man ours is put in the back yard for shelter for birds and squirrels. Most of all she will stop for animals to cross the street.

This rodent was just another motherless, helpless animal she could mother. His basic needs were supplied: love, food and care for his hurting paw. The paw was hanging by a piece of skin and a little bone. Nothing could be done for it. With my brother and mother holding the squirrel still by father clipped the paw off. With a stub well cared for it began to heal. My mother also concocted a special nutritional diet for him which she fed him with a little doll bottle. He also had a warm place to sleep and constant mothering.

(continued)

Skip, continued

Our new arrival soon became an intricate part of our family. He ate, slept and played with all of us. Our dog and cat played tag running through the house. He could move quickly on his three legs. He slept in a shoe box full of cotton balls at the end of my brother's bed. He began eating pecans and other hard foods. He also began chewing on the window sills and baseboards. It was time for a cage made mostly of wire so he didn't chew his way out. He played and ate in his new home and was let out to run around the house for a short time; watched, of course. Many times he would hide and it would be meal time before he was found.

Soon our little adopted orphan was grown up and lonely for those of his kind. Spring came and he wanted to extend to his breed. We reluctantly and with some tears set him out to discover life in the world he came from.

He quickly adapted even with three limbs. We were afraid that not being raised or taught by one of his kind he would be unable to survive in the wild. We had forgotten how powerful instincts were and those he seemed to have. He seemed to have no problem finding food, shelter, or a mate.

He occasionally would show up in the yard. Mom had a dish of nuts by the back door if he did show up. When winter came, we never saw him again. He's gone but not forgotten. Every time we are to see a bushy tail dart up a tree or a furry body run across the road we wonder if it is our lovable orphaned squirrel, Skip.

«««««»»»»»

Julie Haggerty

A CHILD'S HATRED

Crust-filled dishes lay about the small green and white kitchen. Crumbs and brown stains littered the dingy counters. The brown floor that originally had been white stuck to the young girl's stinky socks. The pounding steps of her drunk father are heard as she tries to escape his sight.

"God dammit! Didn't I tell you to clean up this house?" his deep raspy voice boomed.

"Dad, I have been gone for two weeks. I cleaned before...," she started to reply.

"What did I just say to you? Clean this shit up, you little bitch!!"

"No," she softly defied him

"NO? NO! I'll teach you, slut."

His strong, thick-fingered hand swung towards his daughter's face. She flew back into the littered counter, hatred burning in her eyes. she had waited a long time for this, she thought. Pulling the dark, menacing weapon from the waist of her tight blue jeans, she screamed, "Rot in hell, motherfucker!"

A shot rang from the black barrel of the gun. The bullet lodged between the old man's horrified eyes as he fell back to the stenchful floor. She felt no remorse. Satisfaction gleamed in her eyes.

The young girls looked at the body of the man she had hated. She kicked him in the ribs as he had done to her over and over again. She took the old man's wallet out of his left pocket and opened it up to retrieve the money. A picture of a happy little girl sitting in her proud father's lap fell onto the blood-spattered floor.

She laughed hysterically as she ran out of the dreadful house.

«««««»»»»»

Shelly Cawker

ONE OR THE OTHER

"Can't you talk about anything else?" Danielle stormed at her boyfriend Dave. She was so sick of hearing about Anna.

"Dani, be reasonable," Dave begged. "Anna's having a lot of problems lately. She needs me."

"What about me? I need you too," she countered.

Dave sighed, wishing she would understand and knowing she couldn't. She wasn't the same girl anymore. Any traces of warmth and compassion of the old Dani had been replaced by the selfish, self-centered, possessive Dani. Dave didn't like the changes in her at all. She was suddenly so insecure! And her biggest hand-up was his friendship with Anna.

He and Anna had been friends for years. Anna came from a tragic family. Her dad was an alcoholic wife beater and many a time Anna had run to Dave's house to escape his wrath. her mother was seeing a shrink who had her eating tranquilizers like candy. Fortunately, Anna's dad was gone now. One day, he'd left and never returned.

Dave came from a similar situation, but it was his mother who'd abused him for years. Only when he was a teenager could he tell Anna what she did, and only Anna could help send her away.

(continued)

One Or the Other, continued

Their friendship turned into a short-lived romance in high school,. They loved and respected each other too much to risk hurting the other, and agreed that they needed to find love with others, if they could.

For Anna's sake, Dave tried, but it was hard for him to trust other women. He couldn't expect them to understand his past and his reluctance to get too involved. He needed a very special person, but held next to Anna, no one could compare. Until Dani came along.

Dani seemed innocent, the one Dave had been looking for. She was feminine and pretty with Anna's slim features and dark complexion. She was strong and dependable but also understanding and compassionate. But that was past and gone. Somewhere she'd changed.

"Dani..." he began.

"No!" she flared. "Don't tell me to listen and understand! Don't tell me about Anna and her problems! I don't care. What about OUR problems? Don't you care about us anymore?"

"What do you mean, our problems?" he asked.

"Dave, we're never together anymore. We don['t talk--it isn't just us anymore. And you know why? It's because of Anna! You're so preoccupied with her, you don[t have time for ME anymore!"

"That's not true!"

"Yes it is!" she insisted.

"NO!" he flared. "Our problem is not Anna. It's..." he faltered.

"Me?" she supplied.

"Dani, when did you change? You never used to be so possessive, so...insecure."

She could hardly believe her hears. Did he really think she'd changed? Had he been blind all along? What kind of person did he think she was before now?

"Insecure?" she spluttered. "What kind of person so you think I am? Who did you think I was? Some kind of superwoman? We met, I liked you, we went out. Then you started dumping all your problems on me! And not normal problems like having a zit or fighting with your parents, but big, major things like child abuse and your old girlfriend from a broken home. How much did you think I could take?"

"Dumping my problems on you..." he repeated dully, staring at her. She sighed.

"Dave, I'm sorry, but I'm not the strong woman you think I am. I never was. You created in your mind what you wanted me to be. You wanted me to be Anna!"

"I did not!" he protested. "I don't!" but he couldn't say more.

Dani knew she was right about Anna and she hated hurting Dave, but he had to know. Of course she cared about him and she'd tried to listen and understand. She felt sorry for him and was patient with him for months. But when he got crazy over Anna, it was more than she could take.

"Yes you do! Dave, it's so obvious that you love her. You might not know it, but I do, and I can't be that strong. It's up to you now."

Dave sighed, undecided. Was Dani right, he wondered. He'd never considered it before. Maybe she was. Before he could answer, the phone rant.

"Dave? It's Anna. My mom's really sick. She...she's been sleeping for hours...I don't think she's gonna...I think she's gonna die! Could you...help me get her to the hospital?

Covering the phone with one hand, he looked at Dani. "It's Anna. Her mom's really sick. She needs my help." He looked at her, begging her to understand.

"It's up to you now. Anna or me," she said dully, knowing what his choice would be.

Bye Dave, she thought to herself.

"I'll be right there."

«««««»»»»»

Peg Skyberg

SOLITARY MOURNER

Roaring unbearable pain
clutching, tossing at
my insides
digging, clawing at
my body
until I feel trapped.
The monster wraps me in
straps of steel
twisting until I scream
in anguish.
Black days of icy despair,
wild desire to resurrect
the dead.
Spirals up, then down,
lurking at the periphery
of my life.

«««««»»»»»»

Sherry Gunderman

VERNAL EQUINOX

The catacomb of winter
began to melt away
with the rising sun.

The spectres
of a forgotten year
returned
to dance with my sanity.

And I welcomed them eagerly.

The little dark haired boy
with the tremendous personality
re-entered my life
through my subconscious dreams.

And I insisted
that he become reality.
Again.

With the help of a seven digit number
and a persistent memory-
he returned.

Together-
we yearned for the past
and mourned our innocence..

Together-
we enjoyed the present.
Coquettish and naive we remained.

And although he breathed life
into the hollow chambers
of my heart,

My new-found maturity KNEW
that he hadn't changed.
And I regretted wistfully
that on the overcast day
when we had thrown pebbles
into the lake
that the foolish birds
thought that we had been giving them
bread crumbs.

«««««»»»»»

Peg Skyberg

STORM

Flames in the campfire crackled, popped, spit tiny embers into the calm night air. Positioned in a circle around the firewell, the six of us relaxed in our lawn chairs. We talked quietly, making plans for the two days we'd be camping there. I was glad we decided to come today, Friday, because that gave us a few extra hours of enjoyment. We could hear faint voices and occasional laughter from surrounding campsites. We talked about how great it was to be allowed a generous distance between campsites. our twenty-two-foot Terry camper was nestled comfortably, privately, among a small group of trees. This weekend getaway spot was a perfect place for Gary and I to bring our four children. The kids, ranging in age from 4 to 13, enjoyed the camping trips so much they didn't even complain about the work involved. They seemed to enjoy setting up camp, carrying firewood, hauling trash to the dumpster down the road, cleaning the firewell, or doing dishes. We seldom heard them argue while we were camping.

After we toasted marshmallows and let the fire die, we snuggled into the camper for a restful night. The kids were tired from a combination of the trip, the evening activities, and the excitement, so they fell asleep quickly.

Saturday morning the sun arose to a beautiful cloudless sky. Birds were singing their cheerful morning songs as I awoke. It being my favorite time of day, I quietly crawled out of bed. I didn't want to miss another minute of such a lovely quiet morning. Putting on my robe, I tiptoed out the camper door. It was refreshing to be met by pure air and bright sunshine. As I began piling a few sticks of firewood on last night's ashes, I heard the camper door open. Traci, our 13-year-old daughter, stepped out with a smile on her pretty face and whispered, "Good morning, Mom." She took over my task of building the fire while I made coffee.

Traci and I had barely settle into our lawn chairs when the camper door opened again. Traci let out a little groan as her three brothers, Chad, age 8, Jason 6, and Travis 4, stumbled out into the peacefulness she and I were enjoying. From the look on her face, I knew she was thinking they had invaded our privacy. But her expression softened as the three boys smiled and said, "Good morning." As the five of us sat watching the flames grow, our conversation revolved around memories of previous camping weekends. The kids couldn't keep their laughter quiet for long, so that brought Gary out

(continued)

Storm, continued

the camper door in a few minutes.

The cool morning passed quickly as we made beds, dressed, cooked breakfast, ate, and cleaned up. A hike in the woods proved to be a fun activity while we waited for the air to get warm enough to swim. Gary and the boys raced ahead as Traci and I leisurely walked along the path smiling at one another as we heard their laughter drift back to us. Their idea of fun was sometimes a little different from ours.

The activities changed with each passing hour: horseshoes, volleyball, fishing. The campground was pretty full now as more families arrived. The children greeted their weekend friends with happy hellos and excited invitations to join the games.

By one o'clock, with lunch behind us, we donned swimsuits and hurried to the beach. The lake was small but had a well-kept beach all the way around it. The sand was warm and the water glistened in the afternoon sun . We found an empty spot to spread our old quilt. Gary and I stretched out to rest as the boys dashed to the water with inner-tubes under their arms. Traci strolled down the beach toward a group of teenagers playing Frisbee. She joined their game and soon forgot that Mom, Dad, and little brothers were nearby.

Gary rubbed suntan lotion on my back, then joined the boys and became their water buffalo. As I lay in the sun, I listened to the laughter all around the lake. What a perfect, beautiful day!

Screaming from the opposite shore suddenly pierced the air. Laughter halted, movement froze, eyes and ears tuned in toward the frantic voices. It took only a few seconds to realize what was happening. Waist-deep in water, a man and woman were thrashing violently and screaming, "Help us! Our child disappeared!"

I clutched my breast as my eyes darted toward my own children. Gary was instinctively reaching out for our three boys in a desperate protective way. I knew he was feeling as frightened as I was. At that instant, he and I, in unison, as if we had practiced it a million time, looked toward Traci. A lump lodged in my throat as I caught sight of her. With the inventory of my loved ones completed, I directed my attention back to the other side of the lake.

About a dozen people had entered the water by then. They were frantically searching the disturbed surface as the mother crazily wailed, "Please, God! Please, God!" Several women were trying to lead her out of the water but she fought off all attempts.

Traci started me as she dropped onto the quilt, grabbing my trembling arm, and began to cry. As I tried to comfort her, Gary led the boys silently out of the water. With such frightened expressions on their innocent faces, I realized I had to control my emotions.

Everyone on the beach was strangely silent and motionless, as if the world had been put on "hold" like a VCR. The frantic screams from across the little lake grew in intensity until I thought I'd scream too. As I struggled to stay calm, Gary gently herded our sons onto the quilt next to Traci and me. Wrapping towels around them, he glanced at me and quietly said, "Let's go back to the campsite." Other parents were finally beginning to react, and were gathering their children. A horrible sense of doom seemed to overtake all of us. I shivered.

As we led the kids back to our campsite, Travis' four-year-old mind couldn't fully understand what was happening. He asked questions that Gary and I tried to answer calmly. Silence prevailed as word spread like wildfire through the campground.

Sirens suddenly wailed as fire trucks arrived. After helping settle the kids, Gary walked back to the lake to offer help in the search. Our campsite was about a half block from the beach, so we couldn't completely escape the commotion. By then, I could hear voices shouting orders to arriving rescue squads.

The next two hours seemed to pass slowly. Travis fell asleep but Jason and Chad kept begging to walk to the beach to see what was happening. Traci was unusually quiet and withdrawn, occasionally asking me if I thought the little girls were alive.

Head bowed, Gary slowly walked back toward our camper. When I saw him, I sensed his deepening sadness. The kids ran to him with lots of questions. As he gently took Chad and Jason's awaiting hands in his, he looked up at me with tear-filled eyes. Very quietly he said, "Divers found her body about 40 feet from shore." He took a deep breath, then with a sudden sob, he cried out, "She was five-years-old." Together, we drew our children near and comforted them and ourselves.

Filled with sadness, we struggled to make the rest of the day as pleasant as possible. We kept the kids close to the campsite like a mother hen would gather her baby chicks near. An eerie hush covered the campground like a heavy fog. A heavy-hearted atmosphere replaced the bright spirits of the morning.

There was no singing or laughter around the campfire that night. No matter how hard we all tried we just couldn't find anything to laugh about. Maybe the kids secretly felt guilty for being alive when they knew a little girl was lying in a morgue. Maybe Gary and I were feeling guilty for being thankful that our children alive when we knew those other parents must be suffer

(continued)

ing horrible anguish. We said a prayer and quietly went to bed.

Sunday morning the sun rose to another cloudless sky, but we felt an invisible cloud over us. That morning could not produce the fun and laughter we had enjoyed the previous morning. It felt as if nothing would ever be that way again. We were mourning someone we had never known, or mourning what could have been one of ours. I fought back tears!

During breakfast we decided to go home. Somehow, it seemed the right thing to do. Our hearts just weren't into camping today. We had planned to stay until evening but decided to let those plans fall by the wayside. We wanted to be home, hoping we'd feel safe there. There needed to be some distance between us and yesterday, as if that would help make everything okay again.

The distance didn't heal everything. We felt the effects of that camping trip for many years afterwards. Everything could not ever be totally okay again.

«««««»»»»»

Dawn Simmons

MOON

We played palette to the moon
as our skin glowed a crystal blue,
and the stars secretly spied upon us.
The chatter of crickets sprinkled the air,
and I wondered if they, too,
along with the moon and the stars
that took witness,
knew we were there on that night
to whisper goodbye.
A cloud embraced the moon,
and during their brief affair
the earth returned to its natural hue.
As the wind disturbed their heavenly waltz,
the cloud continued its dusting of the sky
leaving the moon to cry alone,
just as you had left me.

«««««»»»»»

Sherry Gunderman

BLOOD SISTER

When I asked her:
"How soon is now?"
She knew what I meant.
When we talked
of the future
our dreams were real.
When I hurt-
she cried.
When she cried-
I hurt.
And when we laughed
others smiled with envy
at our fortune.
Morrissey and Saint Anthony
lullabyed us
to a land of happy promises
and penny wishes
that had been thrown into the green water
on a clear March night.
And when I turned to her and confessed:
"How will I ever survive
when you go away?"
She smiled wistfully and replied:
"I will never be far."

«««««»»»»»

Walter Coffey

THE BLOODY BUNCH

A word of explanation.

Approximately twenty years ago, a television series titled "The Brady Bunch" appeared in an attempt to conceal the demise of the true Brady family. What you are about to read is what government officials have been trying to hid for nearly three decades.

I

Greg Brady had a perverted fondness for any kind of weaponry. At eighteen years old, he was the oldest of six children, and he worked tirelessly to invent new ways to cause pain and misery to any living creature within his maniacal grasp. His inventions included any contraption that could maim, mutilate, torture, decapitate, impale, perforate, saute, and kill other living things. Greg Brady felt a certain sense of perverted power when

(continued)

The Bloody Bunch, continued

using his devices; especially on people.

Greg Brady had a wide variety of weapons at his disposal, while all along he convinced his family that his favorite hobbies were playing the guitar and picking up girls.

In the closet of his attic bedroom was an arsenal that made Adolf Hitler look like an amateur. Greg's collection included two antique Thompson sub-machine guns, any type of knife imaginable, surgical tools he stole while having his appendix removed, an archery kit, hand grenades, garden and lumber tools, hand guns, rifles, shotguns, an acetylene gas blow torch, razor blades, and homemade explosive devices. And to intensify the situation, Greg Brady was accurate with every weapon he owned.

II

Following the last day of high school, Marcia Brady burst into her household with superhuman tenacity. Crashing through the front door like Carl Lewis on fire and screaming at a pitch of nearly 150 decibels, Marcia waved the final report card of her junior year around in the air.

Marcia blasted through the kitchen, leaped through the doorway and landed in the family room where her mother, Carol, was calmly knitting on the couch in the corner.

"Why hello, dear," Carol said without looking up. "Why are you out of breath?"

"Mom! Mom!" Marcia could not catch her breath. "I got all A's on my report! Look! Look!" She shoved the crumpled paper in her mother's face. The paper was damp with sweat.

"Very good," Carol muttered. She handed it back to Marcia without even glancing at it. "Now be a good girl and go torment someone else, dear." Marcia turned around and knocked the Brady's housekeeper, Alice, to the floor as she raced back through the kitchen.

Following Marcia's boisterous departure, Greg Brady entered the family room via the sliding Plexiglass door. He moped in like a scolded dog and sat down next to his mother.

"Aren't you excited about graduating high school, dear?" Carol asked as she continued knitting.

"Mom, I failed every class but one. I can't graduate."

Carol kept knitting unfazed by Greg's news. "Oh well. There's always next year. You can take course this summer."

"And miss my trip to Iran?" Greg lashed out. "Forget that!"

"Suit yourself," Carol replied disinterested.

As Greg and his mother silently concentrated on two contrasting subjects, Mike Brady entered the family room and passionately grabbed his unsuspecting wife.

Carol quickly pulled away from Mike. "Before you rape me, dear, Greg has something he has to tell you. Greg?"

"Oh, Dad. I failed every class but one. What do you think"

"Have fun in Iran this summer, Son." Mike was concentrating solely on his wife's throat. "Carol, I'll be waiting for you after dinner."

Mike did not look at Greg's report card because he believed in Greg's word. Greg had many faults, but he was not a liar and Mike knew it. And Mike did not care.

III

With the drastic exception of Marcia, dinner was melancholy for the Bradys that evening. Throughout the main course, Marcia went out of her way to commend her own accomplishments. The food on the table was slowly replaced by the tension in the air. Suddenly, Marcia decided to console Greg, but in the process she overstepped her boundaries by a large amount.

"Hey, Greg," Marcia yelled across the table. "I heard about how bad you did in school this year."

When Greg looked at his sister, hatred spread across his pathetic face. "So? Hasn't everybody already?" Greg started making railroad tracks in his mashed potatoes in a fit of anger.

"It's okay, you don't have to feel bad about it. According to the National Census Bureau, one of every twenty students in America fail. I guess it just had to be you>" Marcia tried being sensitive for the first time in her life. It didn't work.

Peter and Jan, 16 and 15 years old respectively, burst into laughter while Greg started smashing his peas one by one. "If I wanted to talk about it, I would've brought it up myself. So drop it. Now!"

Greg was firm, but Marcia refused to bend. "Look at it this way, Greg. I'll be in most of your classes next year." Marcia could not hold back her laughter, and Greg's face turned bright red.

"Shut up! Shut up!" Greg hollered and raced upstairs like he had just consumed a box of Ex-Lax. Bobby and Cindy, 14 and 13 years old respectively, laughed in unison at Greg and his plight. With their lead, the rest of the family joined in laughter. Mike and Carol tried their hardest to keep it to themselves.

(continued)

The Bloody Bunch, conti

IV

Greg Brady lay very still on his decaying wooden bed when an abrupt knock on his door interrupted his thoughts.

"What is it?" Greg cried.

"It's me," Peter answered. "Can I come in for a minute?"

"Might as well," Greg succumbed. Peter entered the room and walked up the wooden stairs into the attic. A bead of sweat dripped from his forehead when he read Greg's thermometer at 110 degrees.

Greg sat up in his bed when Peter approached him. Greg was not even breaking a sweat, even though he was wearing his favorite outfit--bell-bottomed jeans, a black turtleneck sweater, and a denim jacket lined with wool.

"I just want to apologize for laughing like I did. I know it must be tough for you right now." Peter sounded sincere as he stood next to Greg's bed. Sweat poured down Peter's face.

"Well, thanks for your concern, but I'd like to be alone right now," Greg said.

"Yeah, I understand. I've always known what you do up here all alone...." Peter smiled devilishly. "...but do you use your left or your right? You big stooge!"

Peter laughed and raced back down the stairs, nearly suffering from heat stroke in the process. As he ran out the door, Jan and Cindy were standing in the entryway. "You suck, Greg!" they screamed together and slammed the door shut.

Greg's face turned red once more, and he clenched his fists in rage. He leaped out of bed and began pacing across his room. "They like to make fun of me?" Greg yelled aloud. "I'll give 'em something to laugh about. I'm gonna kill the bastards!"

Greg loaded all his guns and sharpened every blade. After all had retired for the evening, Greg sneaked out to the backyard and installed a razor-sharp metal blade three inches wide and five feet long onto the top horizontal bar of the swing set. He hooked it with fishing line and tied a rope off to manipulate the device.

Greg's black eyes sparkled in the full moonlight. "It's showtime," he muttered to himself before turning in.

V

Greg Brady dreamed he was the executioner of his entire family, and he woke up the next morning eater to fulfill that dream. As he got dressed, he glanced out his bedroom window just in time to see his mother and Marcia climbing out of the rusted family car carrying shopping bags. Greg watched them walk into the house before he rushed to his closet and grabbed his archery kit. He then raced down to his door and waited for the footsteps of his condemned sister.

When Greg heard the sounds of ruffling paper bags and petite conceited footsteps approaching, he thrust his door open just in time to hit Marcia Brady square in the face. She fell backwards to the floor and her shopping bags followed suit. Her forehead changed colors three times.

"You stupid jerk!" she yelled in fury. "What is your problem?"

"So sorry. Are you hurt?" Greg asked. A maniacal twinkle sparkled in his eyes.

"You are so lucky I'm not bleeding," Marcia ignorantly threatened. "If you ever try to mess my pretty face again, I'll..."

As Marcia continued her idle threats, Greg pulled the bow and arrow out from behind the door and pointed the spear in her direction.

"What? What are you going to do to me, Sis?" he asked softly. Marcia was perplexed.

"Greg, don't have a cow over it. I was only trying to get a point across."

"So am I," Greg replied, "across your forehead."

"Greg, don't be stupid! You'll ruin my modeling career!"

Greg cocked back and let go, and Marcia fell back lifelessly to the floor. The arrow struck three inches deep, exactly between her multicolored eyes.

Greg saw what he did and leaped into the air as if he were in a Toyota commercial. "All right!" he exclaimed while trying to keep his voice down. He grabbed Marcia's legs and dragged her carcass up to his attic bedroom where he dropped her into an empty trunk in the corner of his room. After gloating for a brief moment, Greg took Marcia's shopping bags and threw them into the bedroom she had shared with her two younger sisters. He then began to try to remove the blood stains from the hall carpet, but he soon realized the task was pointless. Assuming no one would notice, he went up to his room to construct his "game plan."

Knowing he had to strike fast and often to avoid suspicion, Greg sketched out a basic order of attack on his remaining family. His warped mind was at its sharpest, but his plan was quickly eradicated with a modest knock on his door.

Without waiting for a response, Cindy walked in and boldly approached Greg. He quickly hid all his written plans before she could comprehend their content.

What is it?" Greg demanded. "I'm busy."

(continued)

Cindy glared at him as if he was a lunatic on a killing spree. "Why is there blood leading up here from the hall?" She relocated the red trail in his room and followed it to the brown wooden trunk in the corner. "What's in this trunk, Greg?"

"None of your damn business! Get lost." Greg stood up. Before he could grab her, Cindy flipped open the trunk and shrieked in horror to see Marcia's corpse lying face-up.

"You killed Marcia!" Cindy brilliantly deduced.

"Damn it, keep your voice down," Greg whispered.

"I'm telling, man...now!"

Greg reached for her, but she was already past him. Thinking psychotically fast, Greg grabbed a medium-sized hatchet from under his desk and hurled it with all his might at his youngest sister. The blade cut straight through her head and pinned her skull to the wall just as she reached for the door.

Greg eagerly grabbed a rag off his desk and wrapped it around Cindy's divided head before dropping her into the trunk she discovered. "Sorry about this," Greg lamented to the corpse, thus confirming his sadistic insanity. "You knew too much, Cindy. And I was gonna kill you anyway."

Crudely dropping the trunk top down on Marcia's hand, Greg eagerly headed downstairs to enjoy his breakfast.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

YOU, TRIGGER-MAN

You,
Trigger-man,
Cop-like cupid
With uneven ears—
Come here
And shoot me
A kiss.

«««««»»»»»

Sherry Gunderman

LITTLE BOYS CRY

I count the stars
and comets fall
to murder disillusioned sheep.
And choices are made
in favor of strep throat.
And flowers bloom in the kitchen sink.
And little boys cry
because the little girls hate them
for using them
and pushing them away.
And they (the boys) comb their hair
and fix their glasses
and buy new clothes.
But nothing can hide their chickenpox scarred nose
or tartared teeth.
The girls love them anyways.
But are forced to run away.
Lest pain and jealousy compress their heart
to the point of suffocation.
And the boys cannot comprehend
the pain they cause.
Because they are happy and carefree
and do not understand love
or hurt.
Only the moment.

«««««»»»»»

Shelly Cawker

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Giovanna writhed restlessly in her sleep. As she clawed at the pillow, rolling her head back and forth, she tried to ward off the nightmarish memories, but she couldn't.

She was five years old again—hiding under a table after being knocked to the floor and kicked in the ribs. Too terrified to move, she whimpered quietly as she peeked out. Mommy was screaming, running around the house, begging, "Howard, NO!" Then she reeled backward as Daddy hit her.

Daddy came home another night with a bottle in his hand. Work that day hadn't gone well, and he started yelling, then hitting. Glass shattered against Mommy's screams, a sliver driving into Giovanna's arm as she got caught in the cross fire. Even after being sent to her room, she heard it.

(continued)

When she was eight, Daddy came to her late at night. He was messy and smelled bad, as he touched her hair, her face, and kissed her cheek. "Daddy loves you so much, Giovanna. You're my little girl, you know. I'm gonna show you how much I love you—even more than Mommy—but don't tell her I said that. Don't tell her about any of this, or Daddy'll have to punish you."

Then she was ten and saw Mom and Dad at the table with rolled up dollar bills, white powder and needles. They'd looked up in surprise, and Daddy offered her one. Mommy protested, sparking another screaming match. Mommy came to her that night. "You always make Daddy mad with your sneaking around." Giovanna shook her head wildly. "Yes!" her Mom yelled. "It's your fault! It's all because of you!" Her fingernails dug into Giovanna's tender flesh before she hit her with a brush until unconsciousness swept over Giovanna.

Suddenly she was sixteen and huddled up in the corner of her boyfriend's room. "How could you let this happen?" he screamed at her before throwing everything in sight and slamming out the door.

Scared and alone in the hospital, with no one but her doctor for support, she felt her first stabbing labor pain and cried out, "Mommy!"

Giovanna bolted out of sleep. For a disoriented moment she was trembling. Perspiration dribbled down her forehead; her breath came in short, hard gasps. The screaming wouldn't stop.

Coming back to reality, she went over to the crib across the room. Little Gabbie was red-faced from screaming.

Clumsily, Giovanna picked her up. She bounced her and tried to soothe her with no luck. She shoved the bottle in the kid's mouth but the child knocked it away and continued screaming.

"Please stop!" she begged Gabbie, but Gabbie had her own ideas. The screams echoed in Giovanna' mind, echoing hers and her mother's screams, ever-increasing. Giovanna cringed from the noise, wanting to cover her ears.

"STOP IT!" she yelled, throwing Gabbie down in the crib. The wailing grew louder.

"SHUT UP!" she screamed, instinctively slapping the baby's face.

On impact, her father's face flashed before her. She snatched her hand away and covered her face. A second later, she sank to her knees in front of the crib and cried.

«««««»»»»»

Dawn Simmons

SEQUESTRATION

The leaves were dying
and we were introduced to one another.
And I wanted to get to know you
but kept my admiration silent,
Because I didn't want to scare you away.

The leaves were gone
and we got to know one another.
As friends
and more.
And I wanted you to be mine
but kept my admiration silent,
Because I didn't want to get hurt
again.

The leaves were reborn
and we grew far away from one another.
As more
and as friends.
And I didn't want to hurt you
but my silent admiration ceased to exist,
Because I wanted your friendship
for always.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

THROW ALL YOUR MEMORIES

Throw all your memories
Into the air tonight
And I will catch them
In a web of dreams
Where we'll reunite.
Laugh your love into the moon
When you look from your constellation,
While I, on my earth,
Will capture the revelation.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

WE'RE NOT DEEP

You can put it to a lack of patience, but Theodora and I had a terrible time falling asleep last night. We tossed in each direction possible for hours, contemplating the state of our lives and life in general. I had been having trouble with an ego disguised as an employee, and Theodora was quietly considering the things Teddy Bears cannot explain to their humans.

We tossed again, like a big salad in a flannel blanket.

Rather than get up, take a walk around the block or read a book, it was in our heads to stay in bed tucked under the sheets, which is how we turned to philosophy.

"My theory," I said to Theodora, "is that since less energy is expended during sleep, the only way to avoid conflict is to remain asleep. Thus, you do yourself a favor if you give yourself a rest."

Theodora just looked at me.

"Furthermore, total world peace can only be accomplished by sleeping nations. It's really hard to blow each other up when you're sleeping with one hand in your pants."

Her blank yarn smile curled a little at the edges, making her brown fuzzy cheeks stick out. My philosophy was doing little good, despite Theodora's amusement, because I could not put it into action. Or inaction, whatever.

The philosophizing continued. "Take, for instance, our personalities. We completely escape them when we are asleep. There are no sleeping actors. We are utterly ourselves—eyes closed, mouth open, drooling onto the pillow. The most sophisticated woman in the world still has to wipe off the white drool crust in the corner of her face each morning."

Theodora didn't answer.

Theodora didn't drool.

"The ego/employee," I continued, "probably holds a pillow to his chest the whole night out of insecurity. By morning, however, he has on his 'awake and alert' mask and takes on the world. Why can't he be happy with the world of his bed?

"'All should consult their pillows and there they would lose their fears and find the way to their dreams.' Aeron Clement wrote that in *The Cold Moons*. Of course, he was writing about badgers, but still.

"'Hermits have no peer pressure.' Steven Wright said that. I think hermits sleep a lot."

I was beginning to lose her.

"You know, Theodora," I went on, "we spend one-third of our lives sleeping. When we were babies, we spent 18-20 hours a day sleeping, which is when we did most of our growing. It's only when we're awake that we begin shrinking (gravity and all).

"And if we subtracted that one-third life of sleep, we would find two-thirds of a boring overworked person moving from action to action with no reaction or reflection time. On and one, event to event—They say if I try to get on I'll get on! But why go on when you can go to bed?"

When I looked over at Theodora to see how she would respond to this last idea, I saw she was asleep. "Proof positive," I said.

"Will you shut up!?" moaned my sister from her bed across the room (her first appearance ever in any of my stories). "Just go to sleep."

"When I was young, they used to get me counting sheep, but the counting I did was all in vain..," I hummed, drifting off...

«««««»»»»»

Judy Belfield

IMPERMANENCE

We might, forever,
lie here together
absorbing each other
from the day
as though we never existed,
no traces left to tell
the space we share
in this long afternoon
stretched by sun
and sentiment.
A pink moment,
pearled like a seashell,
turns over in the light
and falls asleep
in our arms,
disappears into a blur
of yesterdays
we've collected
so carefully...

«««««»»»»»

Bob Loewe

THERE IS A TIME

There is a time between
After vampires go to sleep
Before roosters stir
When papers talk
And colors sing
When flatware walks
And dishes dance
When fishes' bubbles
Drift to the bottom
And the cat watches TV
When people leap
From posters
Land in model cars
And race around the room
Chasing stuffed animals
And toppling piles of books
Screaming to be read again
This is the time to write.
When chickens stir
And the sun comes up
The light eradicates the shadows
Forcing the wonders
To take common form
And the experience is gone

«««««»»»»»

Matt Brown

STRUCTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT

He would pay me a visit sometime this night, I was sure of it. Something was rubbing against my gut instinct, rubbing me wrong. My nerves slowly twisted my stomach into a black hole the further it got past midnight. I knew the window was open, it was always open, but like an unconscious bad habit, I found myself gazing at the open window. The distant full moon that sliced through my window was the only illumination to this shadowy office. Growing tired of looking at the window frame, my eyes shifted towards what was out beyond the window. Out there was a world, a world gone mad.

But I guess I wouldn't have a job if it were any other way. As I looked out at the city, I realized (as if for the first time) as I always did, just how grim it really was. The cold steel structured horizon, gloom filled smog for air, and the terror-stricken streets, all helped to promote the city of its title "Heart of the Crime World." It was this black heart that I swore to protect, as police commissioner of Gotham.

Leaning back in my chair, I let my thoughts and the dark overcome me. A cool September breeze would whisk through the window at its leisure, helping to pass the unbearable waiting. The light caused by the digital desk clock shot out like weak red lasers. It was 12:58.

He would be here soon. Over the years, we had been through thick and thin, yet neither one of us really knew the other. Hoping to ease the tension, I pulled my pipe out of the desk drawer and put it to my lips. Funny.... He had given me this pipe years ago as a gift, to help clear my mind, made me feel more at ease. Just like the feeling of safety he gave to the city.

The strike of my match brought a lightning-like effect to the morgue-like office. But before the tobacco took to flame, the match was extinguished by a sudden, sharp breeze.

"Smoking isn't good for you, Jim," breathed a voice from the dark. He was here. After all these years, a person would think I'd get used to his sudden, unannounced entrances. Some things never change, I thought, as I dusted my pants clean of tobacco.

"Yes, but I've grown quite attached to it," I answered to his hollow comment while reaching for my fallen pipe.

"I'm glad you're here, Jim," he almost whispered. "I've made a decision." He was still shrouded by the shadows. He wouldn't be seen if he didn't want to be. Hoping he would step in front of the moonlight that radiated from the window opposite my desk, I asked him what was on his mind. He lurched two steps from the right into the moonlight's track, creating a perfect silhouette that could only be the guardian of Gotham. The stoic figure took one step in my direction and then came to a stop. Standing still, his very posture was pronounced as a symbol of justice.

"I've decided to retire, Jim. Gotham City no longer seems to have need of me," he said, as if analyzing every word, to be sure of its meaning. "...at least not with O. C. P. around," he sighed, trying to hold in his dignity.

My tongue turned dry as I listened to the words my ears were sending my brain. The shock of his statement made my stomach feel as if I had fallen off a cliff.

All my mind could think of was why retire, what for? But my lips were troubled by his last statement and questioned on their own, "O. C. P.?"

"Let me tell you a story, Jim," he said as he strode forward another step. The whites of his eyes came

(continued)

into view like two burning stars against a pitch night. It was then I also noticed he was favoring his left shoulder with his right hand. With the moon to his back, the silhouette from his cape had made it impossible to detect earlier.

"Earlier tonight," he started, "I staked myself out in an elevated parking garage on the south side of the city. As I'm sure your reports have shown, there have been a recent number of stolen cars from similar garages," he paused as if to set the facts straight in his head before speaking. I told him I was listening and to please continue.

He took three more steps forward, putting him just inches from my desk. The golden symbol of truth and justice that rested on his chest was still blocked by the folding of his right arm to caress his left shoulder. A light shimmer of moonlight reflected off his left shoulder and down the length of his arm. I tried not to stare as I puzzled over the drops that trickled from his fingers to the floor. How had he managed to get only his left arm wet? Unless...unless his arm didn't drip of water...but of blood.

"But this night I wouldn't be preventing an auto theft," he continued, "rather the rape of a young woman. Though each of them were armed with knives, there were only three of them. Three local street punks, out to have a 'good time' at the expense of some young woman they didn't even know, or want to know."

Without pausing, he released his hold on his left shoulder and let both arms rest by his side. he stood solemn like an unstoppable force, as he revealed the bat that hung at his breast.

"I had surprised them just as they had knocked their victim unconscious. I hit the first one to the abdomen, and I could smell the alcohol expel from his gasping throat. The second punk went down just as easy. I was finishing on the third when I realized I was being watched. The last punk dropped to his knees just as I heard a gun cock behind me."

He licked his lips.

"I turned around ready to battle this new opponent when I saw the figure. It wasn't another adversary, but a police officer."

He leaned forward spreading his palms down across my desk top for balance. Looking me straight in the eyes, he gritted his teeth as he added, "A Robocop Model V, to be exact."

He took a deep breath.

"This particular officer," he said while looking aimlessly at the debris on my desk, "must have arrived at the scene just a minute or two after I did. It took a quick look at the litter of people around, and told me I was under arrest."

"Under arrest," I interjected, unable to control myself. I had felt these Robocop officers were too good to be true. From the day they were introduced to Gotham, I felt as if there was something unnatural about it.

"Yes, Jim, under arrest. For four counts of assault and battery." His square chin raised to meet my face. "It thought *I* had beat up everyone, including the woman. The woman was knocked out to say otherwise, and my explanation would mean nothing to it. So I ran."

"And he opened fire on you?" I half questioned and half finished his thought.

"Yes, it caught me in the shoulder, just as I was about to jump off the side ledge. It just nicked me, that's all. Luckily, I was only two stories up." He stopped his story there, and we both just gazed at my desk in the dark.

After rerunning his story through my head, I argued, "But that's no reason to quit. This city needs you."

"My mind's made up, Jim. Sorry," he responded as he took his weight off my desk and stood erect. A print in blood from where his hands had been rested on my desk. I swallowed a pool of saliva from the back of my mouth as I saw the moonlight shimmer over the blood. I turned my attention to him as I continued to compassionately fight to keep Gotham City's hero.

"But don't you realize, *you* saved the girl. That girl would have been raped and maybe killed if it weren't for *you*. Why, if she had to wait for that O. C. P. bag a bolts..."

"Cyborg, Jim. It's a Cyborg. Half man, half machine, and all cop. My war is against crime, not the law. I'm done."

I started to get angry. "You think this is some sort of game? Who can bag the most criminals and be top dog? I'll agree, I don't believe in everything O. C. P. is doing, but it's not like we're competing against them. We're all on the same side for Christ's sake."

He turned his back to me, as if he couldn't look me in the face any more.

"It just isn't that easy, Jim. You know how I work. As of now, I'm a fugitive at large," he replied and then paused.

I could start to feel the hurt in his voice. Each word he spoke seemed to be shoving an invisible knife deeper and deeper in his soul. I'm almost sure I caught a glimpse of a tear roll down around his chin.

(continued)

"Things change," he continued. "It's simple economics. The basic principle of structural unemployment. When the advances in technology grow, they replace the jobs of the blue collar workers. Blue collar, blue cape...what's the difference?"

He lifted his foot up on the window sill, preparing to leave. I couldn't think of anything to say. All I could do was watch him. After securing his rope, he turned to me.

"You're my best friend, Jim. Whether you know that or not. Keep up your end of the fight. A protector of the peace with a badge will never be outdated."

He looked to the floor where his blood had been soaked up by the carpet.

"Sorry about the stains. But I'm sure we'll meet again. In another time, another place...another identity. I'm sure somehow I'll manage to afford new carpeting for you."

This brought a smile to his lips I didn't quiet understand.

"Goodbye, Jim."

He whisked out my office window with his cape fluttering about behind him. That was the last I ever saw of the Batman.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

FIFTH OF WHISKEY IN HIS HAND

fifth of whiskey in his hand,
angel at his bedside,
sounded like Heaven...
and hell.
I was a witness from afar-
saw only printed words-
a newspaper has no emotions.
Star, just like the movies,
fall, just like men;
from mountains and
Heaven again,
unto the earth.

«««««»»»»»

Judy Belfield

PRINCE

We sat
(he and I)
facing each other
late in the afternoon.
He puffed out his throat,
croaked incessantly.
It was impressive,
but I didn't say, "ooh"
or "ahhh,"
just sat
listened.
Then we saw it
at the same time;
his tongue shot out
a second before mine.
The buzz stopped.
I watched him gulp.
I am grateful
he was satisfied.

«««««»»»»»

Joey McGrath

COMING OF AGE

CHAPTER FOUR: GETTING BACK

As soon as I walked back into class, all heads turned my way. They all had the look of, "Oh, he's the one that had to use the restroom." I took my seat next to Larry and waited for class to end. We had another ten minutes left with Miss Brick.

"We were just talking about participle phrases, Timothy. We're on page five," she said.

The next ten minutes moved along more slowly than a funeral. I was counting the seconds until the bell rang loudly to announce the ending of class. Larry and I leaned back in our seats in relief.

"Now don't forget to be back in ten minutes before the next teacher arrives. I don't know if he is as lenient as I am," said Miss Brick.

As lenient? She was about as lenient as Adolf Hitler. The next teacher had to be a tyrant. Larry got up to stretch.

"God, my butt is totally numb!" he said as he walked around in front of his desk.

Everybody else that was in class practically

(continued)

Coming of Age, continued

stampeded over Miss Brick and left her in a trail of dust. She gathered up her books and papers and headed out the door. Larry and I were the only remaining kids in the classroom except for a few other kids who sat in the back of the class. Larry and I decided to stay in class until the next teacher came in.

"What do you think the next teacher will look like anyway?" I said in order to strike up some conversation.

"I don't know. Anything is better than Miss Brick. I swear to God, she must have been beaten when she was a child. Nobody can be that serious all the time unless they're warped in the head."

"Aw, she wasn't that bad."

"If you compare her to a pit bull."

I had to laugh at that remark. If this next guy was supposed to be less understanding than Miss Brick, then we were dead. Math was the next subject on my schedule. My guess would be that the next teacher would be a man. Men usually taught math for some reason or another.

Other kids started to come back into the room now. It was obvious that Miss Brick's warning was duly noted. In a few minutes, the room was filled with loud, talkative kids.

Then he walked in. Everyone was struck silent. The guy had to have weighed 300 pounds at the least. I was surprised that no one had to butter his hips in order to get him through the door. He walked in with a stack of books under his arm and a pointer stick in his right hand. He dropped the books on the desk with a loud "thump." He turned to the class.

"My name is Mr. Baxter. This is mathematics class," he said.

"God, he's fat," Larry whispered in awe.

He took attendance and turned around to start class. He took his pointer stick and started to pace in front of the classroom.

"Mr. Finkel," Mr. Baxter called.

"Yes," said Larry.

"What is twelve times thirteen?" he asked as he still paced to and fro. Larry had the look of horror on his face. What kind of question was this anyway? He didn't even warm us up or anything. He didn't even ask a warmup question like, "What's two plus two?" or something like that. That would be merciful to Larry's poor, tortured brain.

Larry grabbed a sheet of paper and started to calculate.

"I don't want you to work it out on paper. I want you to be able to work it out in your head," Mr. Baxter said without even looking up.

Now this was totally unfair. How is a person supposed to figure it out in his head? You would have to have the IQ of about a million in order to figure a problem of that magnitude in your head. It was just impossible.

Larry's jaw dropped down onto his desk. Obviously, he was thinking the same thing as me. He stared into blank space and started to move his lips silently. Beads of sweat were popping up on his forehead.

"One-hundred and fifty-six," Larry blurted out.

Mr. Baxter stopped his pacing and looked directly at Larry.

"Correct," he stated.

The entire class looked upon Larry in awe and admiration. They had found a new hero to worship. Larry Finkel. The arithmetic demigod.

Larry cracked a smile that stretched across his face and met at the back of his head. He had reason to. He was a natural Einstein. Mr. Baxter turned to me and said, "What's thirteen times ten?"

Talk about being put on the spot! Numbers raced through my mind until I felt like I was about to faint. Then, all of a sudden, the multiplication tables I learned last year kicked into gear.

"One hundred and thirty," I said.

"Correct," Mr. Baxter said.

I wanted to stand up and scream, "YEAH, BABY!" At that moment, I had hit an all-time high. Larry and I both looked like a couple of Cheshire cats sitting there. Mr. Baxter turned and went to test some other students. He went to pick on the kid that got smacked on the head by Miss Brick earlier that day.

"What's the square root of five-thousand-nine-hundred and eighty-three? Remember. Work it out in your head."

Chapter Five: Next One Up

Before our hour with Mr. Baxter was over, half the class was ready for the rubber room. We pretty much figured out his system, though. He called upon everyone at least once during the class period.

By the time the class bell rang, almost everyone in the class had vegetized. Mr. Baxter picked up his books and other implements of torture and walked out the door without even glancing at the class.

"Man! I know I'm gonna hate this class," Larry said.

"This guy's impossible!" said the kid who sat

(continued)

Coming of Age, continued
behind me.

"The guys a regular slave driver. I mean, Ibelieve we have homework already on the first day of school. I mean, jeez. Who are you anyway?" Larry asked the kid.

"My name's Johnny Patterson."

"You new?" I asked.

"Yeah. I just moved here over the summer."

"You got a sense of humor?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"Cool. You want to hang out with us?" asked Larry.

"Sure. That'll be pretty cool. I haven't met anybody since I got to school."

"My name's Tim Wolff," I said.

"Yeah, and my name's Larry Finkel."

"What are the teachers like here?" Johnny asked.

"We don't know. All the teachers this year are new, so we haven't seen what they are like except for these first two that we had," said Larry.

"Yeah," I agreed.

"I wonder what the next teacher will be like?" asked Larry.

"I don't think you'll have to wonder for long," said Johnny as he nodded his head toward the door.

We looked over our shoulders and saw what had walked through the door. She was about seventy years old. She had her silver hair tied up in a bun on top of her head. She wore a yellow buttoned sweater with blue polyester pants. She had a hump in her back that made her look like an Igor replacement for a movie. She sported a pair of horn-rimmed glasses that made her appearance evil. Her gnarled hands held a couple of books close to her side. The only thing that was missing was her walker.

"She's mummified," said Johnny quietly.

"She doesn't look a day over ninety," I said.

She slowly walked over to the desk and slowly lowered herself into the chair. She stared at the floor unmoving.

"What if she dies or somethin' while she's teaching," Larry asked.

"Then I suppose we don't have class," I said.

She sat at the desk taking attendance as we talked about her. She suddenly went into a hacking series of coughing. Everybody held their breath expecting her to curl up and die from a massive coronary. She only pulled out a Kleenex and hawked into it.

"Gross!" said Larry.

"Gross," stared Johnny. "I think it's rather sexy."

We all cracked up.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

THE PARTY GOES ON

The party goes on
without
you
The question is
do
you...?

«««««»»»»»

Shelly Cawker

KELLY

Same old routine, every single night, thought Kelly. Go to work, fill some merchandise, take a break, straighten the store and answer a price check or two. Nothing ever changed.

As Kelly mechanically pulled spray paint forward and stacked up lightbulbs, she caught a glimpse of a teenaged shoplifter being escorted into the office by the security man. Wow, big excitement, she smirked and let her mind wander.

She was facing up the shelves when she saw the cop forcing a young man of about twenty-three out of the store. They guy had long, greasy blonde hair and wore a menacing grin, displaying rotten yellow teeth. He hadn't shaved nor bathed, for he smelled of sweat and stale garbage and his jeans were dirty and torn. He caught her staring too hard and kicked out at her, yelling, "What're you looking at?"

She yelped in fear and surprise and he laughed tauntingly. The kick knocked the cop off balance enough for the hoodlum to wrestle free and pull a long, shiny, silver knife out of his boot. He spun around, swiping the cop's arm with the knife and grabbing Kelly before the cop could get his gun. The hoodlum pulled Kelly in front of him and pinned her there, the knife blade pressed hard against her throat.

He pushed her forward, forcing her toward the cop, who stood frozen and waiting.

"Drop the gun—nice and slow," he ordered in a gritty voice, ruthlessly yanking her hair. The cop obeyed, setting down the gun and kicking it over to the hoodlum. Bending with Kelly still in front of him, and keeping an eye on the cop, the hoodlum picked up the gun and released his grip on Kelly.

"Get over by the cop," he ordered. She quickly

(continued)

did so, continuously touching her neck, unable to believe it wasn't sliced up.

"Now go to the front of the store. Slowly," the hoodlum directed. Long minutes passed as the three of them, the gun to their backs, made their way slowly to the front checkouts. Glass shattered and somebody screamed. The hoodlum jerked toward the noise, and the cop, savagely shoving Kelly to the floor, lunged at him, wrestling for the gun. A stray bullet was fired and seconds later, four other policemen rushed in and nabbed the hoodlum who kept insisting, "I didn't do anything!"

Kelly heard a crashing noise and jumped.

In her careless efforts to straighten a package of lightbulbs fell to the floor, landing with loud pops and shattering glass.

Two policemen were bringing out the shoplifter, a young boy of 15 who'd taken a hand-held electronic game.

"But I didn't do anything!" he was protesting. Then he looked at Kelly.

"What're you looking at?" he snapped. Quickly, she lowered her head to her work.

"Attention shoppers, the time is now 9:00 and your local store is closed," announced the front registers.

Just another boring day at work, she thought.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

THE NIGHT WE DISCOVERED PLEASURE

The night we discovered
Pleasure,
We waited for it to end,
And it didn't,
Because the pain was always there,
A little deeper under the covers.

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

LET ME HOLD YOUR FACE

Let me hold your face
In my hands,
Memorize its details
With my fingertips
Feel you through my skin.
Let me make this
Three dimensional connection
Or you'll face into a photograph.

«««««»»»»»

Judy Belfield

LONGING

I think about your hands
touching me,
place my fingers where yours were.
I cannot feel excitement
only a drawn-out longing:
a thirteen-year-old's
deep-sighing desperate desire
for romance.
I know futility intimately—
the impossibility
of dreaming you here
touching me now.
I walk my rooms distracted
sensing an emptiness
not quite big enough for tears.
I sit and pen words
to touch you
in some mystical way
wherever you are...
and miss you.

«««««»»»»»

Bob Loewe

JUST A BOB

Just a Bob.
That's me.
No one special.
No big dreams.
Just a Bob
Like any other Bob
That's me.
People don't know
My last name.
Why bother?
Surnames are to keep people straight—
Bob Hope
Bob Haskins
Bob Costas.
Famous Bobs.
In one-hundred years
No one will know of any of us.
No one will know of you
And your million dollar buildings
With first, middle and last names
Signed to the deed.
So why bother
Being a three-part name in print
When I can be a Bob in life?
Perhaps in a hundred years
As a grandfather teaches fishing
He'll remember.
"I remember when I learned to fish.
I was taught by some old guy named Bob.
Never did learn his last name.
Don't suppose it matters much.
He was just Bob to everyone.
No one special.
He had a friend,
Signed his name to everything.
Can't remember what his name was."

«««««»»»»»

Sherry Gunderman

HIS HABIT

The sun shone
And the stars glittered
And church bells chimed
And the flowers bloomed—
on the outside.

But he lied to me
about the mirror on his dresser top
about the straw in his room
about his bloody noses
and skyrocketing bills.

He ignored my lectures.
He tossed my love aside.
Didn't he know—
the whole time he was destroying himself,
he was killing me?

The sun shone
And the stars glittered
And the flowers bloomed—
And I waited
With fear—
for the church bells to toll.

«««««»»»»

Rosalyn Neitzel

BEAUTIFUL GAIL

It was Christmas Eve, nineteen fifty-four. The gift I was about to receive that evening would actually be presented thirty years later.

Dad dialed the phone in the hallway and began talking loud to someone for quiet some time. He laughed a lot and made sure my sister, Melva June and I heard him. Then, he turned around and looked directly at me and said, "Santa Clause wants to talk to you, honey."

"Santa Claus wants to talk to me," I thought with great enthusiasm. My heart raced like I had just finished an hour ballet lesson. I scrambled past my sister like the chosen child. Dad picked me up to stand me on a bench so I could speak into the mouthpiece of the old wall telephone.

(continued)

Beautiful Gail, continued

A man's voice began asking me if I had been a good girl all year. It was hard to recap three-hundred and sixty-five days in my busy life upon demand, but I afforded him a quick, "Yeah, Santa." What other possible answer would he expect? Did he want to hear how I fought over everything with my older sister, from what chair I wanted to sit in at supper or who took out the garbage last? So I stuck to my story and proclaimed angelic behavior. He proceeded to ask what gifts I thought I deserved. I recited everything I could possibly remember the kids next door already had. The curiously familiar voice reminded me to help my mother to set the table and not to bicker with my sister. Funny how Santa Claus seemed to know we were getting ready for supper. Then he asked to speak to my sister. "Amazing," I thought, that he addressed her by name.

It was her turn on the telephone bench, so I went to the kitchen to help Mom—just in case Santa Claus could see from wherever he was calling.

When Melva June finished her interview, Dad announced that he was leaving to pick up his parents, fondly addressed as Gram and Cramps Chow-Chow. I do not actually know how my grandparents were dubbed those names, but I surmise it came from my younger brother, Leslie's baby dialect.

Traditionally in our house, jolly ole St. Nick made his stop sometime between supper and midnight Mass. I could hardly wait for him to arrive. Sis and I never actually saw him in our house, but we knew he had been there by the presents he left under the tree.

We accompanied Dad to pick up our grandparents while Mom continued preparing a meal to befit royalty. The drive across town started off with a dispute as to who was going to sit next to Dad and continued with who was going to sit next to Gram on the return trip. Dad was a clever man. He abruptly ended the debate by reminding us that Santa Claus could be watching us. We sat back quietly and postponed our sibling rivalry for the time.

Gram and Cramps came out to the car with packages piled past their chins. I seemed to expect that our grandparents bought us gifts out of love, but the things that Santa Claus gave were rewards for good behavior.

Melva and I jockeyed for position next to Gram rather inconspicuously. I questioned Gram about one particular large box that caught my attention. She said I had to wait till we were home to find out who received what. I was learning at the tender age of eight the virtue of patience which was no easy task.

Dad pulled the old green Plymouth up to the curb in front of our two-story framed house. It had snowed that evening, and the white fluff seemed to add a special touch on that special night. As I slammed the heavy car door behind me, Father pointed to the sky just over our roof. The chimney billowed a steady cloud of black smoke from the coal-fed furnace distracting my view. "Don't you see him?" Dad questioned.

"Who? Who, Dad?" I squealed.

"Look, it's Santa Claus and his reindeers," he replied. I ran closer to my father's side to get his vantage point, but by that time, he said Santa was out of view. How disappointing. Dad's allusive tricks worked for years, because we never doubted his word. It was nothing less than the gospel truth.

As we entered the front door, kicking off our boots, Mom walked down the hallway announcing once again, "You just missed him. Santa Claus was here, but he had to leave. he has a lot of children to see tonight and couldn't stay."

"Sure, see everybody but me," I thought. If he can watch me from anywhere, he should know when to arrive.

I followed Cramps into the living room as he piled the gifts under the tree. To my delight, Santa had kept his promise and delivered a stack of gifts while we were out. Melva ran over to examine the colorful packages for name tags. She could read better than I, but then she should; she had three years advantage over me.

The adults gathered in the kitchen, when Mom called for us to quit fumbling with the packages and wash our hands for supper. To me, supper seemed like another stall in time, procrastinating the main event—opening those veautifully wrapped boxes.

I hurried through my meal hoping everyone would pick up my digestive pace. Unfortunately, they savored every mouthful while enjoying a lively conversation about how 'little' Leslie was growing up so fast. Finishing my meal first only meant I was elected to start some hod, sudsy dish water. Nothing seemed to speed up the process. After several annoying prompts on my part, the dishes were cleared, scraped, washed and dried. Finally, the moment was at hand. I had waited long and hard, suffered disappointment after disappointment, held my tongue, and manipulated the evening the best I could for a child with little influence.

The family assembled around the tree while Dad begin handing out the gifts. He called out our names like a drill sergeant at mail call, and we responded in the appropriate order to claim our goods. When he came to the large, tall box I had questioned Gram about earlier that evening, he paused and said, "This one is for both of

(continued)

you girls to share from your grandparents." Why would Gram do such a thing? A gift we would have to share. Melva June and I began fighting over who was going to take the majority of wrapping paper from the box. How could we possibly share the contents?

The unveiled box described in bold print, **BEAUTIFUL GAIL**, wearing the most exquisite party gown ever designed. Surely, she was the most beautiful doll I had ever seen this close. She stood thirty inches tall, complete with a simulated mink stole and pearl jewelry set. She wore a satin and net evening gown interlaced with silver threads. her soft vinyl bending legs were covered with seamed nylon hose. She stood on backless spiked high heel shoes with rhinestone fronts. Her washable hair was combed in a Harriet Nelson style, which was highly fashionable in that day. She was more than I could have hoped for, and she was mine, at least in part.

Four small eager hands rushed at her simultaneously to hold her. Our eyes were wider than the first time we saw our baby brother, maybe because we were joint partners in this new sisterhood with Beautiful Gail. Sis and I took turns dressing and undressing her, stockings off and then on, earrings in and out. What a wonderful night. We played for hours ignoring all the other games and gifts.

Mom returned to the living room and told us it was our bedtime. We reluctantly went upstairs leaving our new found friend all dressed with nowhere to go but back in the box.

In the morning, we hurried downstairs to play dress-up with our new doll. As usual, Sis and I began quarreling over who was playing and holding Gail the most. Mother wasn't in the best mood that early in the day. She boxed our beauty up and told us that when we learned to share without quarreling we could have her back. Mom placed Beautiful Gail on the top shelf of her closet. There she remained.

Every couple of days, one of us tried to reassure Mom that we had learned our lesson about arguing, but she would remind us of a spat that just concluded.

This went on for weeks, then months, until our visions of Beautiful Gail started to diminish. We stopped asking about her. We never actually forgot about her completely, but certainly we learned to live without her. That was over thirty years ago.

I went to visit my mother one day while she was doing some spring cleaning. As you can guess, she rediscovered that dusty, original box at the back of her closet shelf. It was indeed, **BEAUTIFUL GAIL.**

We opened the box to find the doll I once loved so passionately, entombed, still wearing her satin gown, fur cape, and backless high heel shoes. Mom turned to me and said in words I will never forget, "Honey, take the doll home. You and your sister can fight over who will keep her."

«««««»»»»»

Peg Skyberg

WHERE THE HEART IS

At the age of five, I led an ordinary life, at least, that's what my grandma told me. My memories of that period of life are limited to celebrations and tragedies. One such memory-making occasion occurred April 17, 1949.

My sister, Pat, brother Ron, and I were living with our maternal grandparents in Arkansas. Being cotton farmers on worn out soil didn't provide ample income, so Grandpa also worked as a carpenter. he had an admirable reputation as the best barn builder in the county. On that memorable April 17th, he was putting the finishing touches on a barn over in Howell County, about twenty miles away.

Doing chores and taking care of us children was up to Granny and my Uncle Roy. His unexpected birth when Granny was forty-six had proven to be a blessing now, because at the age of fifteen, Uncle Roy was her right-hand man. Pat, age 8, was a good helper too, and Ron, age 6, was adept at milking cows, feeding chickens, and picking cotton. I also helped, but I'm sure I was more of a hindrance at times. Years later, Granny said I was always a good girl, but didn't say I was a good helper.

That particular day was typical spring weather by Arkansas standards: warm, humid, and a few thin clouds. As morning chores were completed, Granny and Uncle Roy looked forward to a restful afternoon. Planting time was in the near future so leisure time would soon be limited. Hopefully, Grandpa would be able to help with plowing and planting before starting another barn-building project.

It was hot in the kitchen at lunch time because Granny had built a fire in the stove to bake cornbread. After eating, wee went to cool off and relax on the porch.

The large porch, being across the front of the house, was a favorite place to congregate, whether it be to play, visit, or just sit. Grandpa must have had that

(continued)

purpose in mind when he built the house. My mother and her four brothers were born in the house, and over the years had spent many hours together on the porch. It was here that Granny had rocked her babies, then her grandchildren, in the old oak rocking chair that she and Grandpa had received as a wedding gift. I think she loved that rocker almost as much as she loved us kids.

That afternoon, sitting in her favorite chair, churning butter, she watched the sky change from light fluffy cloudiness to ominous darkness. Uncle Roy was entertaining Pat, Ron and me with a silly game he had devised of string and small stones. We were oblivious to the changing weather. As pat and I left the porch to go to the outhouse, Granny cautioned, "You girls come right back. A storm is brewing."

We passed the garden, went thought the gate, and were on the well-worn path leading to the old outhouse when we felt the first raindrops. As a cold drop splattered upon my nose I decided to hurry. pat and I raced to the outhouse, then back to the porch. Even though I was much smaller than she, I could run faster, so of course, I darted up the steps ahead of her.

Granny had set the churn aside. She and Uncle Roy were standing looking up at the darkening sky. By then the wind was blowing rain in on the porch, in spite of the generous overhang Grandpa had left on its roof. We children huddled together in the huge old rocker. We sensed Granny and Uncle Roy were frightened so we were very quiet.

The storm grew intensely, with great streaks of lightning, and roaring thunder shaking the house. Granny, not really speaking directly to anyone, said, "I hope Milas isn't on his way home in this storm."

I knew that if Grandpa were out in such a raging storm the horses could get spooked and run out of control with the wagon. I was suddenly afraid, not of the storm, but of what might happen to Grandpa if he lost control of the horses.

Granny, usually being a quiet person, suddenly screamed, "Roy, let's get the kids to the cellar." With that, they turned and reached for the three of us, still squeezed together in the rocking chair. As Granny frantically grabbed me into her arms, Uncle Roy grabbed Pat and Ron each by an arm and lifted them out of that chair in a split second. Granny, carrying me, ran through the open doorway, then into the bedroom she and Grandpa had shared for over forty years. Clutching my trembling body close, she desperately pulled a quilt from the bed. her grandmother had hand-stitched that quilt and given it to her on her thirteenth birthday. Wrapping it around me, she ran through the kitchen, out the back door, and down the cellar steps.

Uncle Roy was waiting there for us, looking as frightened as Pat and Ron were. Huddled together in a corner, tears swelled up in their eyes. Granny quickly deposited me next to them, sweeping the quilt over us in one great motion. She and Uncle Roy pushed the old creaky door shut with a loud thud. It was dark, cold, and damp down there. I was terrified!

Granny was crying softly and praying as she leaned against the door. The noise from above was becoming louder, growing in intensity until it was almost deafening. I could no longer hear Granny, causing me to panic. I must have been screaming as the roaring monster descended, because when he began to retreat, my throat was hurting.

The black horrible turbulence lessened. Then, sudden silence! It was eerie, and almost as frightening as the thunderous noise had been. Even Granny wasn't making a sound. It was as if the world had stopped and were all deaf and mute.

Granny and Uncle Roy were still leaning against the door, possibly fearing that any movement would bring the fierce raging monster back. Afraid to breathe or move, I held tightly onto Pat's hand. She, Ron, nor I dared move a muscle. We waited for some kind of signal from Granny or Uncle Roy to let us know we were safe. It must have been only a minute, but seemed like hours, before the unbearable silence was broken.

"Mom, it's over," whispered Uncle Roy. "Let's go up."

Together, slowly, they began to tug the stubborn creaky door open. Once again, terror gripped my insides as I expected the roaring monster to bestow his fury upon us again. I held my breath as the door opened and light burst into our darkened hideaway. My eyes blinked rapidly, adjusting to the sudden influx of light, and I continued to watch for an ugly, hideous beast to jump down the steps.

As Granny moved out into the light and up the steps, a noise I had never before heard suddenly erupted. Panic filled me again as I realized the sound came from Granny. She was screeching, moaning, crying, then began wailing, "Oh, my God! Oh, my god!"

Uncle Roy ran up the steps skipping two with each step he took. Then, for the first time, I heard him cry.

Ron was the first to crawl from under the quilt. Pat and I slowly followed. Together, we cautiously walked up the steps toward the horrible crying above. As we reached the top step, I realized Granny was stand-

(continued)

Where the Heart Is, continued

ing where the small back porch had been. My eyes widened in disbelief, in horror, as I saw our house in splinters, scattered across the greening pasture to the north. Blue checkered curtains from the kitchen were spread on top of an apple tree in the orchard. I began to cry too when I spotted half of Granny's rocking chair lying on top of the chicken house. Suddenly, I desperately wanted to be in that chair on our beloved front porch again!

"Granny! Granny!" I cried. With tears streaming down her face, she gently picked me up soothing.

"It's okay, Baby! Don't be afraid."

As Uncle Roy comforted Pat and Ron, we heard a new sound invade our grieving. I held tightly to Granny, fearful of the monster's return, but somehow knowing this sound was different.

It was a relief to realize that sound was racing, pounding hoof beats and a rattly wagon approaching.

Thank God, Grandpa was "home"!

«««««»»»»»

Shelly Cawker

CARINA

Carina rolled over on her bed and stared at the ceiling. John leaving her for the pregnant Olivia sounded just like a stupid soap opera and it was driving her crazy!

Gee, maybe if I close my eyes and hope hard enough, a hazy white mist will settle in my room. I'll think of John and all our good times, all the happiness and he, wherever he is, will stop what he's doing, look into his own cloudy dream, and see the same scenes. Then, unable to live without me, he'll come racing back to me, Carina thought. Yeah, right.

Or, I could kill Olivia. After all, she probably only slept with John because her own rich man is impotent or gay or something. Hey, she's probably my mother, or my long-lost sister anyway. I could rig an elevator and torture her from on top of the car. I always carry a spare blow torch with me, don't you? My evil split personality, Corrine, would take the blame. After all, losing John had emotionally devastated me. You know?

Better yet, I could blackmail Olivia into transferring her unborn baby from her womb to mine, via the doctor who can do everything. Maybe I'd just wait until it was born, switch it with somebody else's terminally ill infant, then skip town. Surely, there'd be a plane bound for any destination I chose, day or night.

Now, if I really wanted to go all out and make John and Olivia feel truly rotten, I'd stage my own death. Blow myself to smithereens in a spectacular car crash, maybe. Unknown to either John or Olivia, I'd be rescued and sent to a witness protection program in Brazil. John would be distraught thinking I committed suicide, he'd abandon Olivia and remain in mourning until Mary Jones arrived in town to help him pick up the pieces. Mary, of course, would really be me, after I allow some doctor to crush all my bones and completely redo my face, voice and fingerprints. John would sense a familiarity between us, and someday—maybe—I'd reveal my secret, unless the mob or somebody was out to kill us.

Carina laughed bitterly at herself. Face it, she thought. He's made his choice. Be realistic. She got up and crossed the room to the TV where she flipped on "General Hospital."

«««««»»»»»

Maria Mellinger

1692 COTTON MATHER NEWSREEL, PART 2

"...lacking the social abstractions that act as islands on the tide of life she quite often saw the unspeakable. And it saw her."

—Clare Boylan,
Black Baby

Her mind and body began their required tasks each morning at 6 a.m. when she called the recorded time and temperature message provided by the First National Bank.

"Good morning," she would say.

"Good morning," the tape would say. "First National Bank time: 6 a.m."

"And the weather?" she'd ask.

"The temperature outside is 64°, with sunshine and low winds throughout the day."

"Well, have a pleasant day."

"Have a pleasant day," the recording would echo.

"Yes, thank you," she'd conclude.

She would then wander her house for hours, watering plants, shuffling dust particles, throwing away magazines, talking with the radio. At 10 a.m., she would board the bus and speak with whoever sat next to her.

Once her partner was a young man who stole her purse, which held only change. The theft led to a nice afternoon spent at the police station, answering questions. The officers gave her coffee and a wonderful stale slice of coffee cake. She rode home that evening in a squad car, quite content.

This particular day, however, provided no partner, and so she spoke to herself. She knew better than to move her lips, of course, as this caused unnecessary concern among younger passengers.

After buying magazines to replace those of the discarded morning's, her misshapen body would enter the bargain movie house and become someone else's.

Some days she was Audrey Hepburn in "My Fair Lady," singing and dancing, tasting soot and champagne. Some days she was Katherine Hepburn in "The African Queen," floating through a jungle with Humphrey Bogart, acting bold and adventurous, alive.

On very good days, she was Scarlett O'Hara or Elizabeth Taylor in "Giant," because she was these women for three to four hours instead of the usual two.

After the movie, she would sit in the darkened theater and pray. The manager took pity on the wrinkled little woman, thinking her tired, and allowed her to sty until the 2 p.m. children's shows began.

For 75 years, she prayed, "Help me to find someone." It was only recently that she began to pray, "Help me...I'm lonely..."

Shortly before 2 p.m., she would exit the theater through a side door, so as to avoid contact with anyone. She couldn't face people with the pain so evident in her eyes, and her lips would move as she thought; they must not see her. The day's tasks were complete. She rode the bus home in silence, ate a dinner of soup and crackers, and went to bed, setting her alarm for 6 a.m.

«««««»»»»»

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE